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ABSTRACT

This action research describes a program for improving writing skills. The targeted population consisted of first and third graders in two middle class communities in the southern suburbs of Chicago. The need for improvement in writing skills was documented through observation checklists, writing samples, and surveys. Data revealed a need for implementation of writing interventions. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that faculty observed difficulties in writing due to the lack of a formal writing program, the amount of classroom time spent on writing due to curriculum demands, and a lack of teacher training in this area. The professional literature suggests the following as reasons why students were poor writers: (1) they were not exposed to writing at an early age; (2) there is a lack of real meaning in their writing experiences; (3) reading and writing remain separate entities; and (4) the curricular focus is on reading and math. The over-emphasis placed on grammar, mechanics, and spelling are also causes for concern. Solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of the following intervention strategies: parent involvement through newsletters and articles, the use of writing centers, the use of e-mail, letter writing, free choice of topics, the use of literature to teach writing, Author's Chair, interactive journals/notebooks, allowing inventive spelling, cross-curricular writing, and encouraging at-home writing. Post-intervention data indicated an increase in the targeted students' writing abilities, a positive attitude toward the writing process, an increased confidence in the editing and revising of student work, and increased parental involvement in the area of writing. (Contains 37 references, and 8 tables and 14 figures of data. Appendixes contain a student writing checklist; a rubric; teacher, parent, and student survey instruments; and permission letters.) (RS)

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KEYS TO IMPROVING WRITING IN THE PRIMARY GRADES

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Abstract

Keys to Improving Writing in the Primary Grades

This action research describes a program for improving writing skills. The targeted population consisted of first and third graders in two middle class communities in the southern suburbs of Chicago. The need for improvement in writing skills was documented through observation checklists, writing samples, and surveys. These data revealed a need for implementation of writing interventions.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that faculty observed difficulties in writing due to: the lack of a formal writing program, the amount of classroom time spent on writing due to curriculum demands, and a lack of teacher training in this area. The professional literature suggests that students were poor writers because: they were not exposed to writing at an early age; there is a lack of real meaning in their writing experiences; reading and writing remain separate entities; the curricular focus is on reading and math. The over-emphasis placed on grammar, mechanics, and spelling are also causes for concern.

Solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of several intervention strategies: parent involvement through newsletters and articles, the use of writing centers, the use of e-mail, letter writing, free choice of topics, the use of literature to teach writing, Author's Chair, interactive journals/notebooks, allowing inventive spelling, cross-curricular writing, and encouraging at-home writing.

Post intervention data indicate an increase in the targeted students' writing abilities, a positive attitude toward the writing process, an increased confidence in the editing and revising of student work, and increased parental involvement in the area of writing.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Students who are inexperienced in communicating effectively through writing present an educational challenge. The first and third grade students in the targeted elementary schools demonstrate a need for increased exposure to books, modeling of the writing process, and a scheduled time to write, edit, and publish. This positive environment is crucial. Many people who did not have this experience go through life believing that they are poor writers and consequently they are disinterested in writing. Evidence of the existence of this problem includes teacher observations, class participation, district and teacher-made writing assessments, student journals, student surveys, and parent surveys.

Immediate Problem Context

This action research was conducted in three communities, three different districts, and four schools. Each setting will be described separately as Site A, Site B, Site C, and Site D.

Site A

Site A is located in a southern suburban community. There are 10 schools in the district: four primary, three intermediate, and three junior high schools. Site A is located on a block adjacent to a forest preserve in the oldest section of town. The school was constructed in 1922 and originally designed to house grades K-12. It presently houses grades K-2. In 1998, the building was remodeled. There is a total population of 371 students. The distribution of racial-ethnic groups is: 91.6% Caucasian, 4.3% Hispanic, 3.2% Asian or Pacific Islander, 3% Native

American, and 5% African-American. The student body has a low-income enrollment of 5.4%. The limited-English proficiency rate of this site is 3.5%. Site A has an attendance rate of 95.9% with no chronic truancy, and a school mobility rate of 6.5% (State Report Card, 1999).

The school offers a Reading Recovery Program in which a trained reading teacher removes individual students from the classroom to work intensively at their level of ability. An early childhood program provides instruction for children who have tested below average during a district preschool screening. Programming for transitioning language students provides a part-time paraprofessional to the classroom. Gifted students are clustered in classrooms and also receive some pull-out and push-in services from a trained teacher. Inclusion students receive a paraprofessional while participating in the traditional classroom. The school provides a basal reading program, math program, and science and social studies programs. At the present time there is no formal writing program.

The district faculty of Site A has an average teaching experience of 13.4 years with 60.8% of the total number of teachers with a master's degree or above. The 335 staff members are 87.7% female and 12.3% male, and of those 97% are Caucasian, 1.2% are Hispanic, and .6% Asian or Pacific Islander. Teachers' salaries average $45,167 and administrators' salaries average $79,832. Throughout the district, the first grade class size averages 18.1 students. The district instructional expenditure per pupil is $3,820 (State Report Card, 1999).

Site B

Site B is located in a southern suburban community. There are eight buildings which house ten schools in the district: one early childhood, one kindergarten, two primary, one building for fourth graders, three first through sixth, and two junior high schools. Site B is located on a busy thoroughfare with private homes on three of its borders. Site B was constructed in 1956 and originally designed to house first through sixth grades. It presently houses grades first

through third. There is a total population of 136 students. The distribution of racial-ethnic groups is: 97.1% African-American, 1.5% Asian or Pacific Islander, 0.7% Hispanic, 0.7% Caucasian, and 0.0% Native American. The student body has a low-income enrollment of 60.3%. The limited-English proficiency rate of this site is 0.0%. Site B has an attendance rate of 94.3% with no chronic truancy, and a school mobility rate of 44.2% (State Report Card, 1999).

The school offers Title I Reading, which is a government funded program designed to improve reading skills in grades two and three. A reading tutoring program is offered for first graders who require additional reading exposure. Students are given individual help by a certified reading teacher who works with them one on one. A science enrichment program is available for those students who achieve a certain stanine on a standardized test. A special education program exists for children with learning disabilities and behavior disorders. A certified teacher works with the children within the classroom setting. A speech and language development program is offered as well. The school provides a basal reading program, math program, and science and social studies programs. At the present time there is no formal writing program.

The district faculty of Site B has an average teaching experience of 9.1 years with 16.7% of the total number of teachers with a Master's Degree or above. The 179 staff members are 87.8% female and 12.2% male, and of those 83% are Caucasian and 17% are African American. Teachers' salaries average $35,099, while the administrators' salaries average $73,201. Throughout the district, the first grade class size averages 23.5 students. The district instructional expenditure per pupil is $2,615 (State Report Card, 1999).

Site C

Site C is located in a southern suburban community. There are eight schools in the district: six primary (K - 5), and two junior high schools. Site C is located on a block surrounded by residential homes. Site C was constructed in 1959 and was originally designed to house grades

K-5. It presently houses the same grades. The building had two additions, one in 1979 and the other in 1994. There is a total population of 606 students. The distribution of racial-ethnic groups is: 93.9% Caucasian, 3.3% Hispanic, 1.2% Asian or Pacific Islander, 1.2% Native American, and .5% African-American,. The student body has a low-income enrollment of 2.6%. The limited-English proficiency rate of this site is 3.1%. Site C has an attendance rate of 95.5% with no chronic truancy, and a school mobility rate of 5.4% (State Report Card, 1999).

The school provides additional assistance to students in the areas of reading and language arts through a program funded by the federal government. The Reading Enrichment and Language Mastery Program (REALM) encompasses Title I, Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI), Language Arts Assistance Program (LAAP), and tutoring programs in grades kindergarten through eighth grade. Title I is funded in low income areas to give students extra help in the basic skills. The Transitional Program of Instruction targets students using English as a second language. LAAP's reading language specialist provides 15 minutes of group instruction in the classroom per week. Teachers in the program need a regular education teaching degree, and aides may be used.

Students can be chosen for the Reading Enrichment and Language Mastery Program (REALM) through various methods. Students may be selected based on teacher recommendations, standardized test results and/or reading readiness scores. A pretest and post-test are given using the Terra Nova in the first grade and the Gates/MacGinitie in the second and third grades. Students from linguistically/culturally diverse backgrounds can be considered for the program. The achievement criteria and the level of performance utilized in assessing the needs of the target population in grades first, second, and third is six months below grade level.

A gifted program offers enrichment activities for above average students. Special education students may be mainstreamed or included in the regular classroom. The school

provides a basal reading program, math program, and science and social studies programs. At the present time there is a mixture of writing programs, but none formally adopted throughout the district.

The district faculty of Site C has an average teaching experience of 13.5 years with 58.2% of the total number of teachers with a master's degree or above. The 267 staff members are 89.1% female and 10.9% male, and 100% are Caucasian. Teachers' salaries average $42,226 and administrators' salaries average $89,704. Throughout the district, the first grade class size averages 26.9 students. The district instructional expenditure per pupil is $2,871.

Site D

Site D is located in a southern suburban community. There are 10 schools in the district: four primary, three intermediate, and three junior high schools. Site D is located on a block surrounded by private homes. The school was constructed in 1976 and originally designed to house grades K-6. It presently houses grades K-3. In 1977, the building media center and 10 classrooms were added. The addition was built with the open school concept. These classrooms have since been enclosed. There is a total population of 472 students. The distribution of racial-ethnic groups is: 86.4% Caucasian, 7.0% Asian or Pacific Islander, 4.7% African-American, 1.9% Hispanic, and 0% Native American. The student body has a low-income enrollment of 8.9%. The limited-English proficiency rate of this site is 3%. Site D has an attendance rate of 95.8% with a .4% chronic truancy, and a school mobility rate of 6.8% (State Report Card, 1999).

The school offers a Reading Recovery Program in which a trained reading teacher removes individual students from the classroom to work intensively at their level of ability. Programming for transitioning language students provides a part-time paraprofessional to the classroom. Gifted students are clustered in classrooms and also receive some pull-out and push-in services

from a trained teacher. Inclusion students receive a paraprofessional while participating in the traditional classroom. The school provides a basal reading program, math program, and science and social studies programs. At the present time there is no formal writing program.

The district faculty of Site D has an average teaching experience of 13.4 years with 60.8% of the total number of teachers with a master's degree or above. The 335 staff members are 87.7% female and 12.3% male, and of those 97% are Caucasian, 1.2% are Hispanic, and .6% Asian or Pacific Islander. Teachers' salaries average $45,167 and administrators' salaries average $79,832. Throughout the district, the first grade class size averages 18.1 students. The district instructional expenditure per pupil is $3,820 (State Report Card, 1999).

The Surrounding Community

Sites A and D

Sites A and D are located in one of the fastest growing south suburbs with many developments approved or underway. The village is very interested in maintaining the natural habitats, sloughs, and wildlife present in its forest preserves. The historical society actively maintains buildings in the oldest section of the town.

The town originated more than one hundred years ago and has grown into a dynamic and progressive community of more than 47,000 residents. The median family income is $76,970 and residential housing values average $182,900. Year-round recreational opportunities abound in the area, including thousands of acres of Forest Preserve with hiking trails, bridle paths, bike paths, and wildlife refuges. An excellent park system includes an aquatic center and ample golfing opportunities. Located southwest of a major city, residents enjoy a variety of housing, plentiful shopping, two Metra stations, and an excellent school system. The village mayor claims, "It is a vibrant place to raise a family" (Local Tribune Homes, 1998).

Site B

Site B is located in a typical older south suburban community. Much of the community built up in the 15 years following the end of World War II between 1946 and 1960. As of 1998, the population was 10,133. The median family income is $9,917 and residential housing values average $79,000.

Over the past 2 decades, the community has experienced a shift in its ethnic makeup. Once an all-Caucasian suburb, the village began attracting African Americans in the early 1980s. The village administrator said the suburb is now 80% African American.

The Chamber of Commerce stated in the local Tribune that the reasons newer residents come to this suburb is for the same qualities that lured earlier generations. The suburban setting on the south borders a major city and is convenient to all the city offers. The village is bordered by an interstate and an expressway. Commuters can walk to one of the two Metra stations from just about anywhere in town.

Site C

Site C is located in a southwestern suburban community and draws students from two villages. However, the information on the one listed below is typical of both. According to the 1997 census, the community has a population of 6,362. The 1998 median home value is $135,462. The median income is $59,201. A sales manager at ERA Rich Real Estate said this community has all the same services you'd get in the surrounding up-scale villages but with significantly lower average home prices and property taxes.

In 1997, the average list price for homes was $142,000, while the average sales price was about $137,000. The village administrator believes that the affordability of housing helps the community to stand out. He also said the success of business development in the community has been a contributing factor in keeping property taxes low. The commercial-to-residential ratio

is very strong. The village has a sprawling park featuring a baseball diamond, tennis and volleyball courts, a picnic area, and a walking path. A new village hall replaced converted residences formerly used by the village. The 15,000-square-foot building includes the police station and stands near a new, 8,000 square-foot public works building.

National Context of the Problem

Writing in the primary grades begins with precommunicative scribbles. The scribbles look like writing in that they move from left to right and from top to bottom, but they do not resemble letters. The children move on to a pre-phonetic and beginning phonetic stage where they use recognizable letters but in a random fashion, perhaps with a correct beginning or ending sound. Children often drite rather than write. Driting is a combination of drawing and writing (Cunningham, 1999). When children become more phonetic, the letters correspond with the actual sounds in a given word, such as botl for bottle. At the transitional stage, writing changes from being an auditory memory task to a visual memory task. Children write the word by how it looks rather than how it sounds (Nos, 1996). Children move on to putting words together to form sentences. They learn to put sentences in sequential order to create a story with a beginning, middle, and end. As children move on through the grades, they learn more about paragraphing and formal techniques of writing.

The task of teaching writing is difficult because writing skills have not been as highly valued as reading or math skills in our country. Brandt (1997) argues that parents and teachers send messages about the importance of reading to children early and often. Many times reading is incorporated into shared family rituals, but writing is less explicitly taught and publicly valued.

Chomsky (1971) maintains that elementary school teachers have always been concerned with literacy, however, most efforts were devoted to helping children read rather than write. "Between the mid 1960's and the late 1970's 'creative writing' appeared as a curricular issue (in

elementary school) because many students clearly were not being exposed to composition before high school" (Stice, Bertrand, & Bertrand, 1995, p. 213). Teachers are now faced with the dilemma of teaching children to write creatively and yet preparing them for the formal testing of the State Standards Achievement Test.

Beginning in the third grade, students are required to take the State Standards Achievement Test which includes writing skills. The students are graded on conventions, focus, organization, and integration of ideas. Teachers are required to prepare their students to meet the high expectations of this test and to meet or exceed the scores from previous school years. While attempting to meet this goal, teachers worry that creativity and writing enjoyment are stifled. "Children tend to learn to write faster, better, and more joyfully when they do so for their own purposes, under the guidance and encouragement of a knowledgeable teacher" (Stice et al., 1995, p. 251). The formal writing process studied to help students pass the test is certainly not done for their own purpose.

Today's teachers must meet the criteria of the required testing without destroying the creativity of the individual student. As difficult a task as that is, many schools have no formal writing curriculum to assist the teacher in meeting that goal. Without a formal program that builds throughout the grades, the students are starting over again each year with a new process to conceptualize. The teacher must assess each student's abilities as they have come from different classrooms with <u>different</u> teachers presenting <u>different</u> methods of writing. Chapter 2 presents the problems today's educators encounter while figuring out how to achieve good test results, foster creativity, and maximize the students' writing potential.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the writing skills of the targeted first and third grade students, the teacher-researchers used a student writing checklist (Appendix A), a student writing rubric (Appendix B), a teacher writing survey (Appendix C), parent writing surveys (Appendices D and E), and a student writing survey (Appendix F). The results demonstrated that there was a need to improve the students' writing abilities. The teacher-researchers strongly believe that the ability to write well will benefit students throughout their lives. In addition, the teacher-researchers believe that the students should develop an enjoyment of writing. However, based on the documentation, the targeted first and third grade students do not possess the necessary writing skills.

The targeted population involved in the assessments consisted of 59 first grade students and 24 third grade students. The first grade class at Site A consisted of 19 students; 16 participated in the research. There were 26 third graders at Site B; 24 participated in the research. The first grade class at Site C constituted 25 students; all participated in the research. The first grade class at site D was comprised of 18 students; all participated in the research.

In order to assess writing abilities, the students' writing was observed in many areas of the curriculum by the teacher-researchers. Observations were noted by the teacher-researchers on a writing skills checklist. A summary of the writing behaviors is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1
Student Writing Checklist: Results for First Grade Raw Data

Stages of Writing	No Progress	Emerging	Satisfactory
Conventions			
Uses capital letters	9	41	9
Uses correct punctuation	20	30	9
Writes complete sentences	12	38	9
Content			
Stays with main idea	21	29	9
Stories have beginning/middle/end	54	4	1
Stories develop sequentially	45	12	2
Uses expanding vocabulary	41	13	5
Uses inventive spelling	6	42	11
Uses traditional spelling	38	18	3
Enthusiasm			
Attends to writing task	9	36	14
Edits work	42	13	4
Shares writing	14	35	10
Writes 1-5 sentences	4	45	10
Writes 6-10 sentences	50	6	3
Writes 11-20 sentences	56	1	2
Writes for many purposes	16	36	7

N=59 First Grade Students

The student writing checklist was used during the first month of the 2000-2001 school year at each of the four sites. Each child in the targeted first and third grade classes was observed and assessed during a variety of independent writing activities. The checklist was used to acquire

baseline information concerning the variety of levels of writing ability. A writing sample was also obtained from each student to be saved and compared to future writing samples.

The results of the first grade student writing checklist show that the use of writing conventions is emerging in most students. Much of the first quarter writing instruction focuses on proper capitalization, correct punctuation, and writing complete sentences. The students are responding to that instruction. In contrast, many of the students show no progress in the area of content because instruction in main idea, sequencing, and paragraph organization techniques does not begin until the second quarter. Enthusiasm, which covers attending to the writing task, sharing of writing, and writing for a variety of purposes, is emerging in most of the first graders.

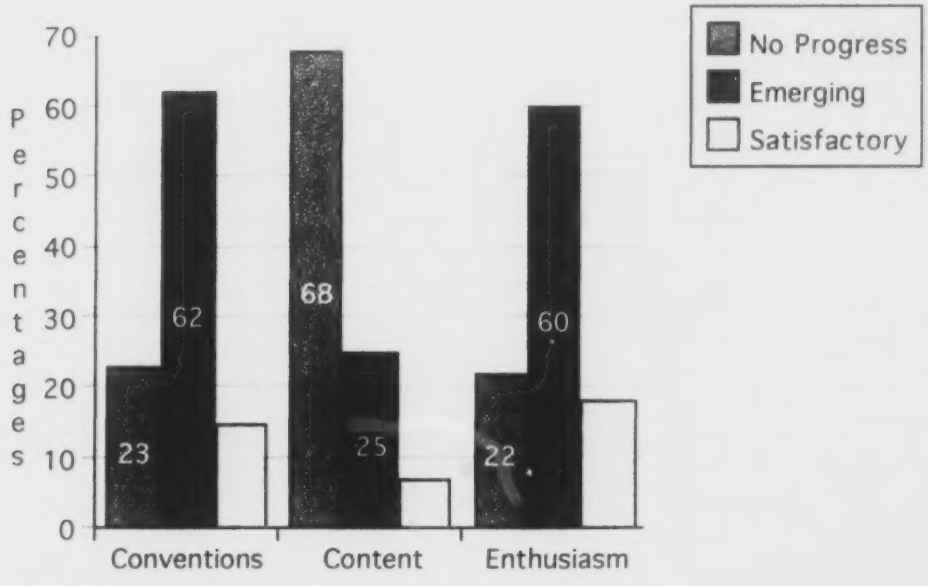

Figure 1. Sites A, C, and D first grade writing checklist.

Table 2
Student Writing Checklist: Results of Third Grade Data

Stages of Writing	No Progress	Emerging	Satisfactory
Conventions			
Uses capital letters	16	8	0
Uses correct punctuation	10	14	0
Uses complete sentences	13	11	0
Content			
Stays with main idea	11	13	0
Stories have beginning/middle/end	11	13	0
Stories develop sequentially	11	13	0
Uses expanding vocabulary	11	11	2
Uses inventive spelling	0	9	15
Uses traditional spelling	1	21	2
Enthusiasm			
Attends to writing task	8	16	0
Edits work	23	1	0
Shares writing	7	17	0
Writes 1-5 sentences	6	18	0
Writes 6-10 sentences	8	16	0
Writes 11-20 sentences	23	1	0
Writes for many purposes	3	21	0

N=24 Third Grade Students

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The results of the third grade student writing checklist show that the use of writing conventions is not progressing in 54% of the students. Many students in this classroom are not incorporating what they are learning about conventions into their daily writing. Similarly, 46% of the students show no progress in the area of content because these students are not confining their writing to a main idea. They are not using organization skills to create logical, sequential writing pieces. Enthusiasm, which covers attending to the writing task, sharing of writing, and writing for a variety of purposes, is emerging in 75% of the third graders.

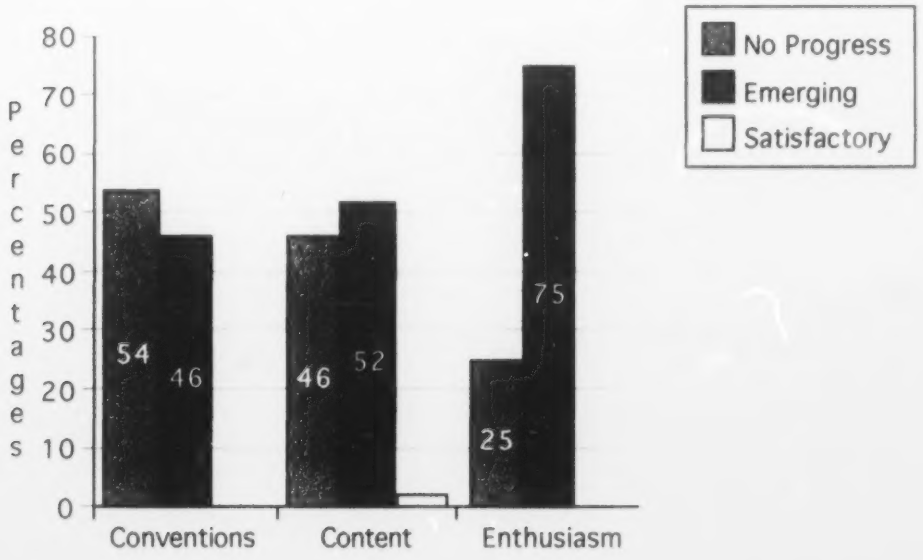

Figure 2. Site B third grade writing checklist.

A second tool was used to assess students' awareness of writing conventions and their own feelings as directly related to their writing. This rubric, a student writing rubric, was used by the teacher-researchers in October of the research period. A summary of the students' personal assessments is presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3
Student Writing Rubric:Results of First Grade Raw Data

	Yes	No
Conventions		
I used capital letters to begin names.	29	30
I used capital letters to begin sentences.	39	20
Each sentence ends with a punctuation mark.	35	24
I tried to fix the spelling of the words that are underlined.	27	32
Content		
I used complete sentences.	33	26
My story has a beginning, middle, and end.	29	30
I used details that tell a lot about my topic.	39	20
I read my story to see if it makes sense.	50	9
Attitude		
I used my best penmanship.	37	22
Draw a face that shows how you feel about your story.		
Happy	54	
Neutral	4	
Sad	1	

N=59 First Grade Students

The use of this tool in the first grade classrooms showed that more than half of the children had positive feelings regarding their writing skills. In the area of conventions, 55% of the first graders believed that they were using capital letters, punctuation, and editing their spelling. Fifty-seven percent of the students were positive about the content of their writing

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including the use of complete sentences, beginning, middle, and end, and the incorporation of details in their writing. Ninety-two percent had a positive attitude about the story they were evaluating. In the teacher-researchers' opinion, the children are naive about the components of writing. The goal would be to keep the positive attitude constant while increasing the knowledge of what conventions and content truly are. First graders often do not have the necessary background information to evaluate their own work this early in the year. Instruction in these areas has been minimal and will increase as the year progresses. The teacher-researchers are concerned that when the understanding of conventions and content increases, the positive attitude may not remain the same.

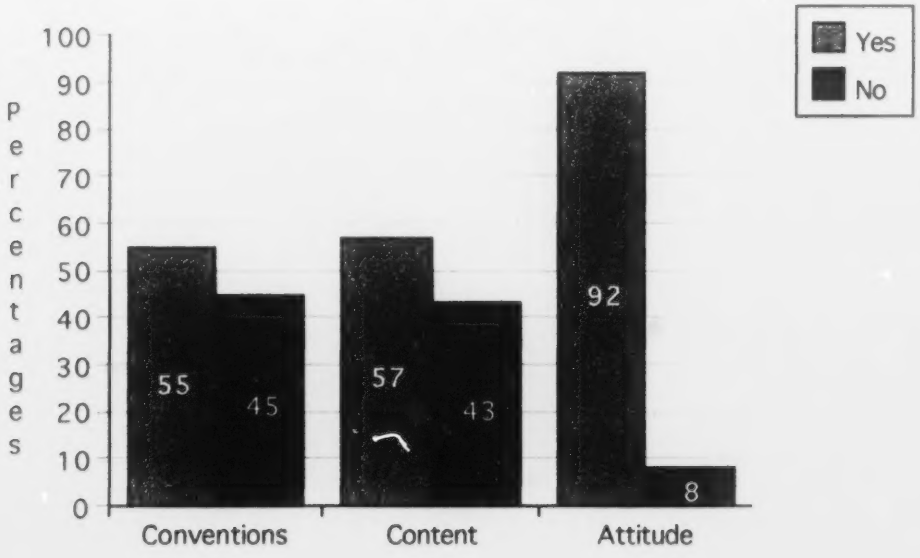

Figure 3. Sites A, C, and D first grade writing rubric.

Table 4
Student Writing Rubric: Results of Third Grade Raw Data

	Yes	No
Conventions		
I used capital letters to begin names.	20	4
I used capital letters to begin sentences.	20	4
Each sentence ends with a punctuation mark.	7	17
I tried to fix the spelling of the words that are underlined.	7	17
Content		
I used complete sentences.	18	6
My story has a beginning, middle, and end.	23	1
I used details that tell a lot about my topic.	19	5
I read my story to see if it makes sense.	22	2
Attitude		
I used my best penmanship.	20	4
Draw a face that shows how you feel about your story.		
Happy	17	
Neutral	4	
Sad	3	

N=24 Third Grade Students

The use of this tool in the third grade classroom showed that more than half of the children had positive feelings regarding their writing skills. In the area of conventions, 56% of the third graders believed that they were using capital letters, punctuation, and editing their

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spelling. Eighty-three percent of the students were positive about the content of their writing including the use of complete sentences, beginning, middle, and end, and the incorporation of details in their writing. Seventy-one percent had a positive attitude about the story they were evaluating. The children have had two years experience and instruction in the components of writing. In the teacher-researchers' opinion, the students are beginning to realize that they are experiencing difficulties. Third graders have some background information in order to evaluate their own work even this early in the year. The teacher-researchers wonder if with additional practice and instruction in conventions, content, and writing techniques, the students' positive attitudes will increase.

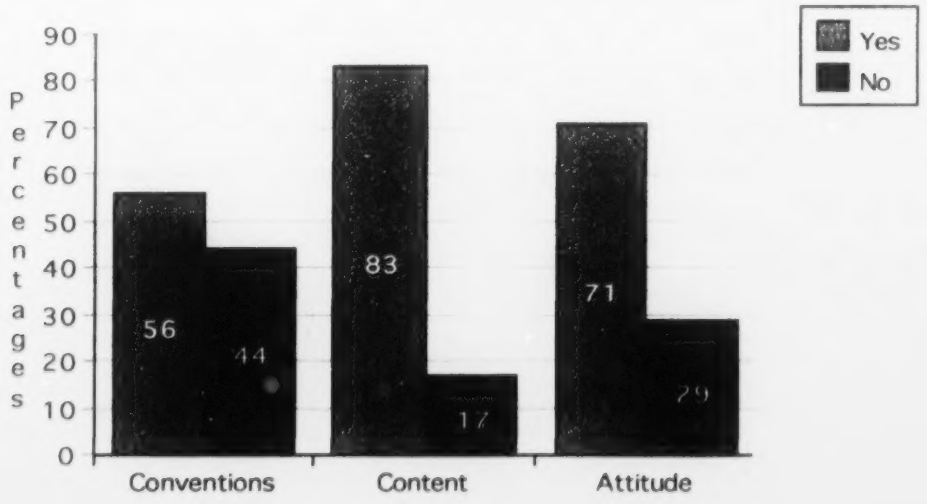

Figure 4. Site B third grade writing rubric.

The teacher-researchers created and administered a teacher survey to kindergarten through third grade teachers at Sites A, B, C, and D. This survey inquired about a variety of things including but not limited to teachers' training in writing instruction and time devoted to the teaching of writing. A summary of teacher attitudes is presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Results of Teacher Writing Survey

Survey Questions				
How long has it been since you attended a writing workshop or class?	0-5 years	6-10 years	11-20 years	Never
	25	7	1	3
How do you view your own writing skills?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
	0	9	24	3
Do you feel confident teaching writing?	Yes	Somewhat	No	
	21	14	1	
How much time do you devote to the teaching of writing in your classroom per week?	0-1 hour	1-2 hours	3-5 hours	5 or more
	5	12	16	3
Do you find it difficult to find time for writing due to the demands of your curriculum?	Yes	No		
	24	12		
Do you use a formal writing program that has been adopted district-wide?	Yes	No		
	16	20		
Which of the following writing activities do you use when teaching writing?	Responses			
Book reports	14			
Letter writing	26			
List making	17			
Class books	28			
Journaling	29			
Shared writing	18			
E-mail writing	4			
Free choice topic	23			
Teacher-directed topic	32			
Other	3			
Overall, how would you describe the attitude of your students toward writing?	Very negative	Negative	Positive	Enthusiastic
	0	6	22	4
Overall, how would you describe the writing skills of your students?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
	3	17	15	0
Do you feel creativity suffers due to the preparation for standardized or state tests?	Yes	No		
	27	9		

N=36 Teachers

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The informal survey was administered to the teachers during the first week of the 2000-2001 school year. The 36 teachers who participated in the survey represented kindergarten, first, second, and third grade teachers. The following is a summary of the information that was collected.

How long has it been since you attended a writing workshop or class? Attending writing seminars or pursuing classes in writing provide an indication of the teachers' abilities to write and to teach writing. Of those teachers surveyed, 25 had attended a writing workshop or class within the last 5 years, seven had attended within the last 6 to 10 years, one had attended 11 to 20 years ago, and three had never attended a writing workshop or class. It is significant to the teacher-researchers that 30% of the teachers had not attended a writing workshop or class during the past 5 years. The researchers believe that this lack of professional development suggests that the teachers are not familiar with the new views on writing. The relationship between these numbers and the 67% of teachers who spend less than two hours per week on writing is notable. Perhaps these teachers are not aware of the research showing the importance of frequent writing experiences.

How do you view your own writing skills? Twenty-four of the teachers reported that they had good writing skills, nine felt their skills to be fair, and three judged their skills to be excellent. None of the teachers rated themselves as poor writers. The fact that 92% think they are only fair or good writers, and only 8% valued their writing as excellent may be a reason for some concern.

Do you feel confident teaching writing? Twenty-one of the teachers surveyed responded that they are confident in teaching writing, fourteen felt they were somewhat confident, and one was not confident. In view of the importance of self-confidence in teaching writing, the fact that 42% of the teachers are only somewhat confident or not confident at all in their teaching is of

great significance.

How much time do you devote to the teaching of writing in your classroom per week? Of the teachers surveyed, 16 related that they spent from 3 to 5 hours teaching writing each week, 12 reported teaching 1 to 2 hours a week, and five stated that they taught 1 hour or less per week. Three teachers spent 5 hours or more teaching writing every week. Forty-seven percent of the teachers spent 2 hours or less on writing per week. That is less than one half hour a day.

Do you find it difficult to find time for writing due to the demands of your curriculum? Twenty-four teachers reported that they did find it difficult to find time for writing due to the demands of the curriculum. Only 12 teachers responded that it was not difficult to find time to teach writing. The researchers found it significant to note that many of the teachers who indicated that they taught writing less than 2 hours a week also did not find it difficult to find time for writing. Sixty-seven percent did note the difficulty in finding time to write during the week. The teacher-researchers felt there was a relationship between the number of teachers who felt the curriculum to be overloaded and the amount of time spent writing.

Do you use a formal writing program that has been adopted district-wide? Sixteen teachers stated that they did use a writing program that had been adopted district-wide, and twenty reported that they did not. The teacher-researchers found it interesting that teachers within the same building disagreed as to whether or not they used a writing program that had been adopted district-wide. This may be an indication of the lack of information and training given to teachers in the area of writing instruction.

Which of the following writing activities do you use when teaching writing? Thirty-nine percent of the responses indicate use of book reports, 72% use of letter writing, 47% use of list making, 78% use of class books, 81%use of journaling in the classroom, 50% use of shared writing with their students, 10% use of e-mail, 64% allowance of free choice topics, and 89% use

of teacher-directed topics. Eight percent indicate other strategies such as Power Writing, computer writing, and writer's workshop. The high percentage of teachers directing the topic may be of some concern. The teacher-researchers feel that the high percentages in some areas, such as journaling, may imply that there is not a lot of student or peer editing or other methods of feedback.

Overall, how would you describe the attitude of your students toward writing? Thirteen percent of the teachers noted an enthusiastic attitude in their students. Sixty-eight percent of the teachers reported that their students had a positive attitude toward writing. Nineteen percent responded that their students had a negative attitude toward writing. It was reassuring to note that none of the teachers reported their students as having a very negative attitude toward writing.

Overall, how would you describe the writing skills of your students? None of the teachers rated their students' writing skills as excellent. Forty-three percent of the teachers felt their students had good writing skills, 48%of the teachers reported fair skills, and 9% noted poor writing skills. Over half (57%) of the teachers rated the students' skills fair or poor. The low level of student enthusiasm and abilities in writing may be due to the lack of actual experience, the drill approach, and low instruction time.

Do you feel creativity suffers due to the preparation for standardized or state tests? Twenty-five percent of the teachers surveyed did not feel that creativity suffered due to the preparation for standardized tests. Seventy-five percent of the teachers did report that creativity suffered.

A second survey was administered to the parents of the teacher-researchers' first and third grade students. This survey focused on parent observations of writing habits at home. A summary of parent observations is presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Results of Parent Writing Survey

Survey Questions	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
Enjoyment			
Does your child enjoy writing and drawing pictures?	5	26	52
Does your child share his writing with you?	7	32	44
Experiences			
Does your child write stories at home?	42	31	10
Does your child write letters to you or other people?	24	41	18
Does your letter write poems at home?	62	18	3
Does your child keep a diary/journal at home?	62	14	7
Does your child have opportunities to see you writing at home?	6	35	42
Technology			
Does your child e-mail friends or family?	61	18	4
Does your child write at home on a computer?	33	35	15
Mechanics			
If your child does write at home, does he/she write with your help?	17	44	22
Do you think spelling interferes with your child's writing?	31	31	21
Parent Concerns			
Do you have concerns about your child becoming a writer?	54	19	10

N=83 Parents

The parent survey was sent home to the parents during the first month of the 2000-2001 school year. The 83 parents who participated in the survey represented the parents of the targeted first and third graders. The teacher-researchers reviewed the responses to the following

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two questions (Does your child enjoy writing and drawing pictures? and Does your child share his writing with you?), evaluated them together, and discovered that the parent survey confirmed the teachers' survey, which showed that the children enjoy writing. Fifty-eight percent of the parents surveyed expressed that the children frequently write stories, draw pictures, and share their stories at home. The researchers were happy to find that 58% of the targeted children did enjoy these experiences. It is a concern to note that 42% are not frequently enjoying writing and drawing or sharing their written work with a parent. This lack of parent involvement is of concern since research shows that parents who are involved have children with higher achievement scores.

The teacher-researchers reviewed the responses to the following four questions, (Does your child write stories at home?, Does your child write letters to you or other people?, Does your child write poems at home?, and Does your child keep a diary/journal at home?) evaluated the questions together, and discovered that the parent survey showed that while the children enjoy writing, their experiences in the home are limited. Eighty-eight percent of the children infrequently or rarely write at home. Even letter writing, which is an historical avenue of communication, and probably one of the more common forms of family writing, is not being utilized by the parents surveyed. The teacher-researchers feel that journal writing is a method of writing that is fairly friendly and easy to implement and therefore wonder why more families do not take advantage of it. It seems to be a contradiction that while the children, the parents, and the teachers say that children enjoy writing, they are not doing much of it in the home.

The teacher-researchers reviewed the responses to the following two questions (Does your child e-mail friends or family? and Does your child write at home on a computer?), evaluated them together, and discovered that infrequently or rarely did the children use technology for writing experiences. Fifty-seven percent of the parents said their child rarely e-

mailed friends and family or used the computer for writing in the home. The teacher-researchers speculate that due to the expense involved with the ownership of the computer as well as additional online costs, these families may not be able to provide these writing opportunities. The computer is a relatively friendly writing tool for children because it is easy to correct errors and revise writing. Children are attracted to the computer and technology more so than pencil and paper. The teacher-researchers feel it is unfortunate that more children cannot take advantage of this modern tool possibly due to cost. Many children who do have computers, are using them to play games rather than using them as word processors.

The teacher-researchers reviewed the responses to the following two questions (If your child does write at home, does he/she write with your help? and Do you think spelling interferes with your child's writing?), evaluated them together, and discovered that the parents do not feel that mechanics is the reason that their children do not write. Seventy-four percent of the parents are not frequently involved in assisting their children when writing. Even if a child is capable of writing, parent involvement encourages the child to do more. Lack of parental involvement does not send a positive message about the importance of writing to the child. The teacher-researchers also discovered that many children do not observe their parents modeling writing at home. This is of great concern since parents are a child's first teachers.

The teachers-researchers were concerned that while 88% of the children were not writing frequently at home, the parents for the most part (again 88%), were not concerned about it. The teacher-researchers speculate that this is because primary parents might place a higher priority on learning to read than on learning to write.

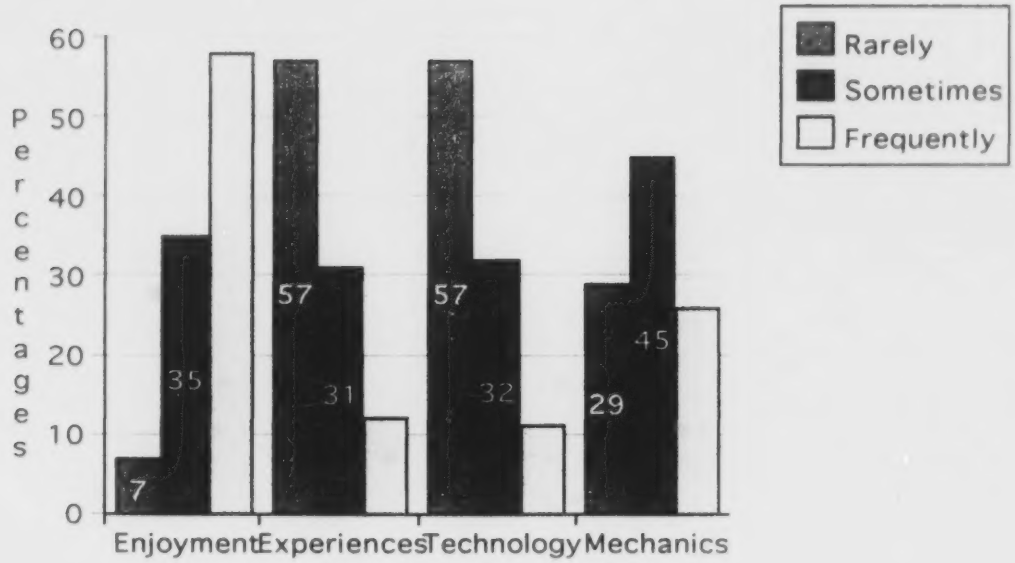

Figure 5. Parent writing survey.

A third survey was administered to the first and third grade students of the teacher-researchers. This student writing survey focused on students' feelings about the writing process, their writing experiences so far, as well as their insights into their own success. A summary of student observations is presented in Table 7.

Table 7
Student Writing Survey: Results of First Grade Raw Data

	Yes	No
Enjoyment		
I enjoy writing most of the time.	34	25
I share my writing with friends and family.	49	10
I like to publish my writing.	29	30
Experiences		
I write for real reasons and real purposes.	17	42
I write in a journal or diary at home.	15	44
Technology		
I type on the computer at home.	37	22
I write e-mail messages.	15	44
Mechanics		
I like to edit and revise my writing.	22	37
I like to get suggestions from others to make changes in my writing.	17	42
I know the steps to write a good paper.	18	41
Other		
I am becoming a better writer.	29	30
My teacher gives me enough time to write.	27	32
I use words easily when I write.	19	40
I like to read my work in the author's chair.	27	32
I consider myself a writer.	31	28
I want the teacher to give me ideas for me to write on.	36	23
I like to choose my own topics to write on.	26	33
I am an author.	18	41

N=59 First Grade Students

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The student writing survey was administered during the first week of the 2000-2001 school year. The 59 students who participated in this survey were the targeted first graders. The two grade levels were separated because of the difference in their school experiences. The surveys were done individually with the first graders; the teacher read, explained and recorded the answers. Table 7 reflects the responses of the three first grade classes. Table 8 documents the third grade responses. The teacher-researcher read and explained each question, but the children recorded their own responses.

The teacher-researchers reviewed the responses to the following three statements (I enjoy writing most of the time., I share my writing with friends and family., and I like to publish my writing.), evaluated them together, and discovered that 63% of the students surveyed enjoy writing. This is good news because it shows that children at this age value their writing accomplishment and want to share it. This reconfirms what the teachers and the parents stated regarding enthusiasm and enjoyment for writing.

The teacher-researchers reviewed the responses to the following two statements (I write for real reasons and real purposes. and I write in a journal or diary at home.), evaluated them together, and discovered that 73% of the students have limited purposeful writing experiences. The parent survey concurred with this by noting that the students did not use letter writing, e-mail, or journaling frequently in their homes. This information demonstrates the need for intervention. Young children need to understand the many reasons why writing is important in their lives.

The teacher-researchers reviewed the responses to the following two statements (I type on the computer at home. and I write e-mail messages.), evaluated them together, and discovered that 56% of the students do not use the computer at home for writing stories or e-mailing messages. This may be due to the unavailability of a computer at home. The teacher-researchers

would recommend adding a question on the survey to find out if there actually was a computer in the home. This information closely matched the information given on the parent survey. The teacher-researchers wonder if this is due to the lack of a computer or that the children are thought to be too young to use the computer for these purposes.

The teacher-researchers reviewed the responses to the following two statements (I like to edit and revise my writing. and I like to get suggestions from others to make changes in my writing), evaluated them together, and discovered that 67% of the students do not like to edit their writing or accept suggestions on how to make their writing better. At this age level, it is difficult enough to write a first draft, much less a second and third. The students at this level must concentrate on so many details such as how to hold a pencil, how to form the letters, which letter makes a certain sound, and what they want to say, to mention a few. Editing and revising is too much for these students to internalize at this time in the year. It is disheartening for first graders to have to face the thought of making corrections. Erasing in itself is a fine motor skill that many first graders do not possess. They put so much time and effort into the original that they do not want to think about doing it over. First graders think that if they use capital letters and appropriate punctuation, they have completed the steps to writing a good paper.

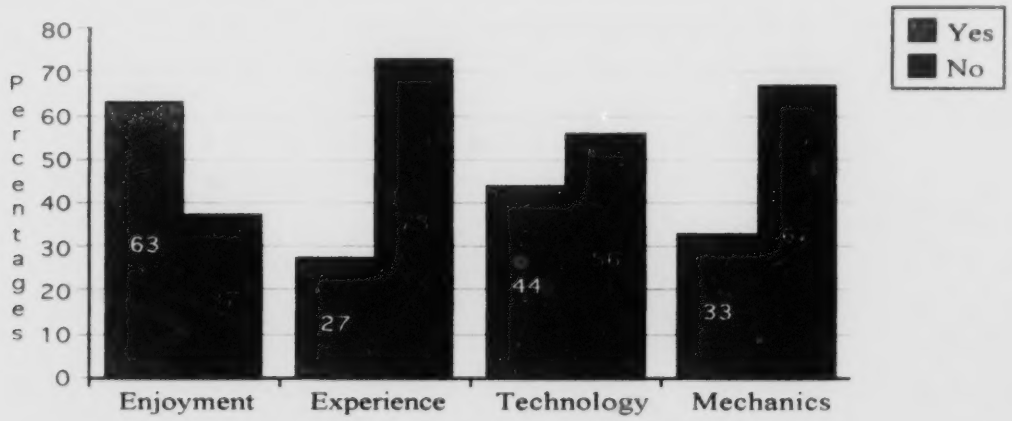

Figure 6. Sites A, C, and D first grade student writing survey.

Table 8
Student Writing Survey: Results of Third Grade Raw Data

Survey Questions	Yes	No
Enjoyment		
I enjoy writing most of the time.	6	18
I share my writing with friends and family.	5	19
I like to publish my writing.	8	16
Experiences		
I write for real reasons and real purposes.	6	18
I write in a journal or diary at home.	10	14
Technology		
I type on the computer at home.	5	19
I write e-mail messages.	5	19
Mechanics		
I like to edit and revise my writing.	4	20
I like to get suggestions from others to make changes in my writing.	6	18
I know the steps to write a good paper.	19	5
Other		
I am becoming a better writer.	12	12
My teacher gives me enough time to write.	12	12
I use words easily when I write.	4	20
I like to read my work in the author's chair.	7	17
I consider myself a writer.	8	16
I want the teacher to give me ideas for me to write on.	17	7
I like to choose my own topics to write on.	5	19
I am an author.	5	19

N=24 Third Grade Students

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The student writing survey was administered during the first week of the 2000-2001 school year. The 24 third grade students who participated in the survey were the targeted third graders.

The teacher-researchers reviewed the responses to the following three statements (I enjoy writing most of the time., I share my writing with friends and family., and I like to publish my writing.), evaluated them together, and discovered that only 26% of the students surveyed enjoy writing. This shows that children at this age and at this time of the year do not value their writing accomplishment and are not willing to share it. This information confirms the need for positive intervention. The teacher-researchers feel that this lack of enjoyment towards writing and sharing reflects the amount of drill on format writing and a lack of being able to write for one's own enjoyment. Writing for personal reasons and or meaningful purposes other than to pass a test should not only be allowed but encouraged.

The teacher-researchers reviewed the responses to the following two statements (I write for real reasons and real purposes. and I write in a journal or diary at home.), evaluated them together, and discovered that 67% of the students have limited purposeful writing experiences. The parent survey concurred with this by noting that the students did not use letter writing, e-mail, or journaling frequently in their homes. This information demonstrates the need for intervention. Young children need to understand the many reasons why writing is important in their lives.

The teacher-researchers reviewed the responses to the following two statements (I type on the computer at home. and I write e-mail messages.), evaluated them together, and discovered that 67% of the students do not use the computer at home for writing stories or e-mailing messages. This may be due to the unavailability of a computer at home. The teacher-researchers would recommend adding a question on the survey to find out if there actually was a computer

in the home. This information closely matched the information given on the parent survey. The teacher-researchers again wonder if this is due to the lack of a computer or that perhaps family and friends do not encourage written correspondence.

The teacher-researchers reviewed the responses to the following two statements (I like to edit and revise my writing. and I like to get suggestions from others to make changes in my writing.), evaluated them together, and discovered that 79% of the students do not like to edit their writing or accept suggestions on how to make their writing better. For these students, the effort required in revising does not seem worth the time involved. The teacher-researchers hope that the use of buddy editing and the ease of computer editing will encourage the students to revise their work.

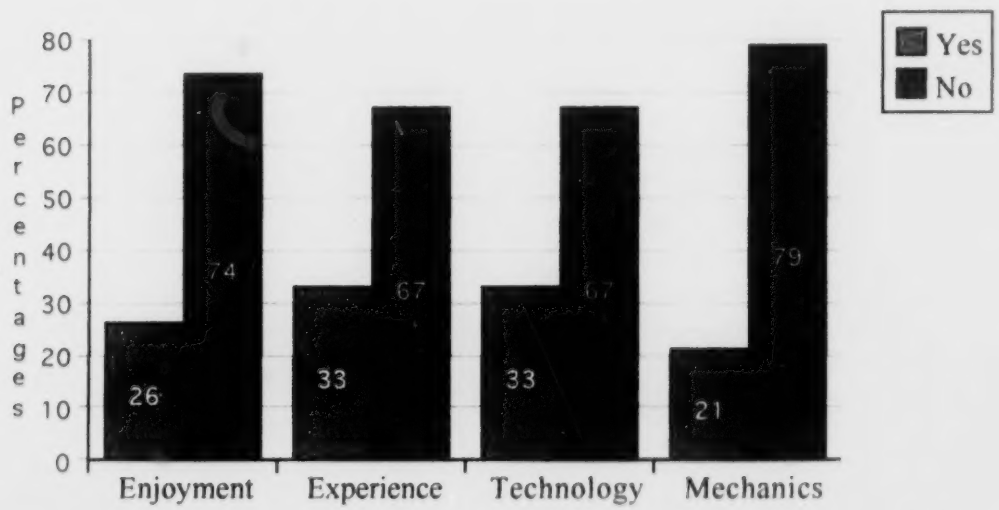


Figure 7. Site B third grade student writing survey.

Probable Causes

Lack of Early Exposure to Writing

Children are capable of writing at a very early age. Calkins states that "...children can write sooner than we ever dreamed was possible" (Calkins, 1986, p. 47). Parents and teachers may underestimate childrens' writing abilities and not provide the time and tools that children need to realize their potential. Teachers and schools have been instrumental in making parents aware of the importance of reading experiences in the home. Writing, however, has never risen to the forefront as a skill that should be not only allowed, but encouraged at a very young age. Graves and Stuart (1985) explain that:

> Parents seem to be naturally inclined to respond to beginning talkers in a positive way, thus speeding their progress. As beginning writers and readers, however, children are treated quite differently. A mother hears her nine-month-old son producing the first Mmmm sound that could possibly be interpreted as Mama. She laughs and kisses him, saying, "Mama! Mama!" to show that his attempt to communicate has been successful. Five years later she arrives at his kindergarten on another important day. He has written his first words: "I LOVE MOME." Her first response: "Mommy is spelled wrong." (p. 33-34)

Children who are ready to explore language through writing will be afraid to write if they receive criticism rather than the encouragement they received as they were beginning to speak. Because speaking and writing are so closely linked, a child who is inhibited in oral language may also be inhibited in written expression. By accepting a variety of writing from scribbling to invented spellings to copied words, we will find that young children can reveal creative stories before we ever thought they could write (Cunningham, 1995). The high writing expectations that parents have serve only to cause apprehension in young children who are just beginning to explore their

capabilities. Parents expect their children to have adult abilities and want them to write and spell perfectly from the beginning (Payne & Shulman, 1998).

With guidance and support from teachers, parents may become increasingly involved in home learning activities and thereby model and guide their child to grow in their knowledge of writing. School achievement is influenced by the amount of time parents spend preparing their child at home (Roberts, 1992). Children who read, are read to and questioned, hold conversations, and write notes at home gain an edge in language use. Families that fail to provide these types of support systems have children who do not succeed as well in school (Berliner & Casanova,1993).

Many adults do not recognize the amount of writing that they do throughout the course of a day. Adult writing activities, which include bill paying, completion of forms, and work related duties are done in private or when the children are away at school. In many households, children never observe parents put pens or pencils to paper. Many parents fall prey to the media which drain the family's time and keep them away from the written word. The television often replaces family discussions at the dinner table (Wiener, 1990).

Although some writing activities may appear to warrant privacy, taking advantage of teachable moments that seem less threatening such as recipe writing, grocery list making, or even notes to family members are not always used to their fullest advantage. When parents fail to involve their preschoolers in these varied writing activities, the children lose valuable background experience.

Lack of Adult Confidence in Writing

When asked if they are writers, the overwhelming majority of adults will say "no" because they do not consider their writing activities to be valuable forms of writing. Household writing activities are valuable and authentic forms of writing and provide excellent teaching

models for children. These are the types of activities in which children need to see their parents engaged. We should never ask children to participate in a process we ourselves have not experienced. Parents and teachers read with and to children every day. This is not the case with writing. Rarely do we write with children or share our own writing. Many adults lack confidence and are afraid to write (Routman, 1991). Adults who believe that they themselves are poor learners or struggled in reading and language activities fear their children will follow in their own footsteps. Parents often justify their child's inabilities by blaming or comparing their child to themselves as early learners (Graves & Stuart, 1985).

Teachers are equally frustrated and uncomfortable with writing. When they reflect, most find they have bad memories or perhaps no memories at all about early writing experiences. Many of us remember being praised for a writing project and then asked to edit again and again until we conclude that we do not want to go through the process again. We all can recall countless worksheets with blanks to fill in, writing reports about unknown topics that were copied from encyclopedias, book reports that were retellings of stories, and poems that were completed by enthusiastic parents. The teacher seldom gave guidance as to how the assignment was to be accomplished. Worst of all was when writing became equated with punishment. We were often asked to copy sentences directly from a book or repetitively from the board (Graves & Stuart, 1985). None of these experiences would create a feeling of comfort, confidence, or enthusiasm for the writing process

When we think of writers, we consider people who are published in journals or in books or those who have had extensive training through classes and workshops. Many teachers have not written a research report or a personal essay since college nor have they published articles or books. Teachers may wonder if they are positive writing role models for their students (Johns

& Lenski, 2000). They may seek out classes to improve their skills yet find it difficult to locate these types of opportunities.

Most colleges and universities fail to provide teachers with sufficient classes in writing instruction and development (Silberman, 1989). The teacher-researchers remember taking many reading and math methods classes. Only limited suggested activities such as story starters and book reports were presented as suggested writing activities. These certainly are not creative methods or models to use to produce quality writers in the classroom. It is difficult for teachers to feel confident about their work if they have not been sufficiently trained to do the very things they must teach others to do (Graves & Stuart 1985). Many parents do not know that teachers have not been prepared to teach writing, either in school or through teacher training programs. Teachers often fall into two categories--those who think they do not know how to teach writing but feel they have to, and those who think they do know how to teach writing but do not teach it.

> Writing is a craft. Because it is a craft, it involves an apprenticeship, working with an experienced practitioner. Asking inexperienced writers to teach writing is the same as passing out scalpels to medical students who have never put one foot into the operating room and asking them to perform surgery. It's tough on the surgeon and its tough on the patient. No wonder students and teachers are nervous about writing. (Graves & Stuart, 1985, p. 147)

Teachers are left to pursue their own training through elective college courses, workshops, or staff development opportunities offered through the school district. Some have noted that there is a wealth of course offerings in reading, math, and science, but writing courses are not abundant (Wiener, 1990).

Main Emphasis on Reading and Math

Graves and Stuart (1985) noted:

> As a part of a study he did for the Ford Foundation in 1978, Donald Graves took a look at the status of courses in writing instruction in teacher-training programs. In a random survey of the offerings in education departments at thirty-six universities, he found 169 courses in reading, 30 courses in childrens' literature, 21 courses in "language arts", and 2 courses in writing. There has been little improvement in the situation since then, as enrollments have dropped and funds have declined in university education departments. (p. 48)

Graves (as cited in Gibisch, Lumpkins, Sewell, & Vagena, 1995) also found a disparity in the amount of research money being spent for reading and writing by the departments of education. For every dollar spent on the study of writing, three thousand dollars were spent on the improvement of reading (Fletcher, 1991).

A trip to the library by a teacher-researcher found a preponderance of books on the instruction of reading and math. These books were directed to parents as well as teachers. However, the amount of books on the instruction of writing was limited to a few choices. And further more, many of the books on writing instruction were not all that current. Reading and math also seem to be the curricular areas receiving the biggest push in the primary classroom. In essence, teachers, parents, and administrators prioritize reading and math. Science and social studies are important too, but if something has to go, it cannot be reading or math!

Little Time Spent on Writing

Routman (1991) feels the best we can do as teachers is to nurture writing , encourage it, sustain it, and give it time, space, freedom, and room in which to grow. It is interesting that schools with set curricula in other areas neglect to put in place a formal writing program. It is

assumed that the teacher will fit it in across the curriculum. Unfortunately, priorities are set on reading, math, science, and social studies, and writing gets pushed to the side. Districts often expect writing workshop, format writing, and other writing activities, but there are no orderly means of achieving these goals.

The lack of a formal writing program results in very little time actually spent on writing. When students see this, they learn not to value writing in the same way that they value the other curriculum areas. Routman (1991, p. 165) says it is very important to create uninterrupted blocks of time devoted solely to writing. Research points to the fact that the ideal amount of time devoted to writing is between 45 to 90 minutes a day. However, on any given day in a primary classroom, the teacher must also allow time for special programs including music, physical education, computer lab, media center, and art. In addition to this active schedule, the primary teacher must contend with recess, snack, lunch, and a variety of other activities that must be incorporated into the school day. It is this hectic schedule, the teacher-researchers feel, that hinders the teacher from devoting a block of time to writing. Primary teachers are concerned about trying to cover the rest of the curriculum as well as trying to add the writing component. Teachers do not feel good about themselves when they cannot accomplish this overwhelming task and tend to isolate themselves behind closed doors (Graves & Stuart, 1985).

Lack of Real Meaning in Writing

To make the most efficient use of their time, teachers often feel they need to provide students with story starters and the instructions to expand the starter into a full story. This type of writing is reflective of their own experience, and simply provides a topic for the student having difficulty. This type of writing lacks voice. Graves and Stuart (1985) define voice as "...the imprint of the person on the piece. It is the way in which a writer chooses words, the way in which a writer orders things toward meaning. As writers compose, they leave their

fingerprints all over their work" (p. 37). When students are writing to meet the teacher's demands, or about subjects they care little about, they may not be able to complete the assignment because they lack prior experience and a firm knowledge base. An assignment such as this is completed simply to make a grade and not for the joy that would come from writing with a voice. Graves and Stuart (1985) expressed that:

> The worst problem we see in college writing is the paper in which "nobody's home." We do this to students. We do it to them in school by having them write about things they know nothing about. Worse, we have them write about things they don't care anything about. The writing is for only one person, the teacher. (p. 38)

When students are only writing for the teacher, they tend to write what they think the teacher wants. The writing may follow the formula, but lack the real and meaningful content that we see when students are allowed to write on a subject of their own choice. Children seem to write more on unassigned topics as compared to those assigned by the teacher (Graves & Stuart, 1985). We often underestimate the capabilities of children. We try to force them into writing about things that have nothing to do with them, or that have little or no interest to them. We do not know or understand what interests move children enough to make them want to write. Most classrooms are reflections of the teacher, not of the children. Effective classrooms are filled with the things children know and what they want to know more about. By providing artifacts, experiences, and building up a knowledge base, teachers give children something to say in their writing.

Teachers are often so overwhelmed by an abundance of workbook pages required by the curriculum, that they often do not have the time to spend on purposeful writing. Exercises, skill sheets, and isolated activities cannot be considered good writing, nor do they produce good writers. Writing to learn and learning to write are not the same (Sorenson, 1991). Writing must be done for real purposes.

Reading and Writing Not Connected

Amazingly enough, many people do not make the momentous connection between reading and writing. Everything we have ever read was written by someone. Conversely, what we write is read by someone. The two are intricately intertwined and should be taught in that manner. This is supported by Cobine (1995) who argues:

> Reading and writing exist only in relation to each other. Writing is to reading as waking is to sleeping, as giving is to receiving. the one act presupposes the other act. Together, the two acts are one act, and yet each remains a separate act, at the same time. Literally, to write and read, we must give and receive. (p. 1)

Unfortunately, in the usual instructional approaches to reading, writing plays little or no role. Reading is taught as a sequence of discrete skills to be mastered one-at-a-time by students (Cobine, 1995). Brandt (1997) interviewed more that 80 people to investigate the ways in which peoples' reading and writing skills formed and developed. Her sample represented a cross section of the population in terms of age, race and ethnicity, place of birth, educational level, and occupation. The results of the study showed that while reading seems to be valued in many families, writing is not.

The best childhood reading experiences would include bedtime stories with a parent, library visits, and memorizing nursery rhymes. Learning to read is motivated by these types of memories and experiences. Many parents encourage reading readiness skills as part of normal parental responsibilities. With the exception of showing young children how to form letters or checking spelling on homework assignments, parents seldom spend equal time on writing readiness activities (Brandt 1997).

Emphasis on Grammar and Mechanics

Most children come to school capable of expressing themselves verbally. This is evident through classroom activities such as show and tell, relating personal experiences, and creating new endings to stories. Many young children innately possess the ability, desire for, and love of spinning creative tales. These potential writing ideas, however, are often hindered by well-meaning parents and teachers who put undo emphasis on grammar and mechanics. Many adults feel that the correctness of the spelling, punctuation, and grammar are more important than the message in the writing (Graves & Stuart, 1985). Enthusiasm is necessary for writing, therefore writers whose work is picked apart, poked at, and reworked tend to become less interested. It is only natural for a child to become disheartened and use "nice" when she really wants to use "delightful." After all, "nice" will at least be spelled correctly.

Invented spelling is a step in the progression of the beginning writer's ability to write words by attending to their sound units (Richgels, 1987). Some teachers are uncomfortable with the students' use of invented spelling. They fear comments from parents and administration alike alluding to a lack of instructional skills. Teachers who understand the stages of writing, however, know that invented spelling is one of several necessary steps in the writing process. It is not something to be stopped or allowed with embarrassment. "The things that young children seem to do naturally when given paper and markers are now viewed as true forms of writing" (Diffily, 2000, p.1). The painful correction of error after error, especially when accompanied by emotions such as impatience, disgust, or anger, squelches the writing desire that lies within a child (Wiener, 1990). Graves (1985) sums this up by saying:

> Then there's just the way we criticize what people put on paper. Time after time after time, writers are reminded of what they don't do well, not what they do well. So they have no turf. They have no language. They only make mistakes; they only have

poor handwriting or poor spelling. To protect themselves, they invest nothing in the piece. (p.39)

Young students often grunt and groan when asked to write, rather than recite. Their recitation is welcomed with smiles and questions whereas the errors in the written work are emphasized. The personal message is lost and the grammatical incorrectness is highlighted. Writers who express personal feelings in their work and say what they think, can feel inhibited and disheartened after experiencing criticism. "So gradually, from first grade on, we start to knock children's writing voices out of them" (Graves, 1985, p. 39).

Emphasis on Format Writing

Students in most districts around the country are groomed at an early age to be able to write in a certain style in order to pass standardized writing exams. This formatted writing is very regimented, and can only be considered creative at the very basic level. Students who learn this style tend to mold and form their other writings to match this style. Then, when asked to write creatively from the heart, it is difficult for students to find their voice.

Teachers are forced to choose between creative writing and trying to prepare the students for standardized and state testing. Relatedly, the classroom teacher is applauded and admired for achieving high test scores and not for his or her true abilities as a creative classroom instructor. It is the over-emphasis on test scores that forces teachers to devote the majority of time teaching to the test. These scores reflect only a few days work. Unfortunately, teacher accountability is judged by the students' successes and failures on these tests rather than their performance in the classroom over the course of a year (Gibisch, et al., 1995). "The tests from first grade through the Graduate Record Exam all deal with small units of information which are circled or underlined. Because we test this way, we teach this way. And that is the tragedy" (Graves & Stuart, 1985, p.17). Writing is not a fill-in-the-blank process. Teachers should be stressing the importance of

writing as a lifetime skill and not as something to be done to get a grade. Chapter 3 explores solution strategies to assist teachers in balancing test-taking obligations with more authentic writing experiences.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Early Exposure to Writing

Writing is a monumental part of a child's life and education. From the first day of school children are required to write their name, the alphabet, and the numbers. The amount of time spent writing multiplies as they move through the grades. The old paradigm focused on neatness, punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure. Today's educators are changing the focus to include writing as a communication skill across the curriculum. A child's writing confidence increases with praise and encouragement from the adults in his or her life. As with anything in life, the level of confidence is directly related to the amount of time spent on a given activity. The more time spent writing, the better.

Emergent literacy research has shown that children are not ruined by being allowed to write when they are very young. Instead, they learn many important concepts and develop confidence (Cunningham, 1995). Parents often accept unintelligible syllables as words. The first time an infant makes a sound similar to "Ba" we assume this to be the word bottle. We react with smiles and encouragement. So too should we react positively when our preschoolers put pen to paper and scribble precommunicative doodles and tell us their meaning.

Parents can increase their child's level of confidence and self esteem by praising effort at all times, listening without distraction to a youngster who is speaking, and encouraging reading frequently. Finished products should be hung on the refrigerator, sent to Grandma, or left as a

surprise for Mom or Dad (Wiener, 1990). The important thing is that we are dazzled and delighted by what children do.

There are innumerable writing experiences for a parent and child to share including writing shopping lists, completing crossword puzzles, and leaving notes for family members. Wiener (1990) tells us that children learn by imitation. When his daughter would observe him in his study writing, she would demand her own pencil and papers. Parents and teachers can establish writing as a vital and enjoyable process by allowing children to observe their writing activities. "A child who sees a parent crossing out lines and crumpling up paper understands that writing is a process that may go through several stages before completion" (Graves & Stuart, 1985, p. 200).

Research shows that there is a high correlation between a child's success in school and the amount of parental involvement at home. Those children with parental involvement at home have better grades, higher test scores, long-term academic achievement, and better attitudes than those with apathetic parents (Henderson, 1988).

The "most important aspect of parent involvement is---communication, communication, communication" (Clark, 1995, p. 64). Teachers can involve parents by communicating with them and providing family activities that support the classroom writing activities. Parents can provide writing materials to be included in a writing center in their home, assist their child with homework, and expose their children to environmental print.

Promoting Adult Confidence in Writing

Bridging communication between home and school will help instill confidence in writing. At one time, Calkins (1994) assumed this communication was about sending letters to students' parents with samples of their work and conducting parent workshops. But now she believes there is a far bigger picture. The research clearly shows that children who have had frequent experiences to write at home are more confident and willing to take risks at school. The home is

much less structured and more familiar than the classroom. It is this environment that is capable of producing the teachable moments that can only be dreamt about by teachers (Rich, 1985). The potential is there, it is just not being taken advantage of in its entirety.

In schools, we know reading and writing will blossom in a rich environment with interactive settings. If we want children to be lifelong writers, we need to encourage families to create these same richly interactive conditions in their homes. Not only should children spend time on independent reading and writing, we may suggest families share passions and projects with the people of their lives (Calkins, 1994). When children read and write with people they love, they experience the excitement of the process. Children are able to connect writing with a memorable occasion. Vacation diaries and journals are a powerful example of how parents can model writing with their children. A supportive environment, where parents encourage and praise their childrens' efforts, is an essential element of the writing process.

The teacher-researchers recognize that parents are the first teachers of their children. By conferencing with parents, we help foster the understanding that there are many occasions for shared writing in the home and that it is through shared writing that students can learn to become independent writers (Payne & Schulman, 1998). Shared writing activities are more authentic "homework" because they bring more meaning to what we do at school. They are now applying what the teacher is teaching to their everyday life. We want their stories and family adventures to carry over into the classroom just as reading, writing, and theme studies will carry over into the home.

Emphasis on All Subjects Via Cross-Curricular Writing Activities

When writing happens across the curriculum, as with journals, writing represents a different method of learning and provides a reflection of that learning. If we want writing across the curriculum to emerge, we can begin by instilling this philosophy in our students. By

providing them with time to reflect on science and math activities, they begin to make connections. Providing this time to reflect will affect childrens' learning and what they remember about the unit.

There need not be a great difference between the way we write in a writing workshop and the way we write in a social studies class. Both start at the beginning by recording what we recall, hear, see, and notice. Then we need only to contemplate, question, and imagine. Students need to know that there are strategies for thinking while they write. They need to know teachers are encouraging them to put on their thinking caps.

More Time Spent on Writing

Good writing can be a result of the conditions for learning created in the classroom. The main idea to establishing a classroom writing environment is to keep it simple and predictable. If students are going to become better writers, we want their ideas to grow and gather momentum. If our students are going to have the chance to do their best and then to make their best better, they need the luxury of time. Sustained effort and craftsmanship are essential in writing well, yet they run contrary to the modern curriculum-driven classroom (Calkins, 1994).

> When a group that has been writing for a long time misses a couple of days, it's not a major problem. They're thinking about their work anyway. They'll probably write at home or at lunch, even if the teacher doesn't provide time. You simply can't stop them. Children who write regularly often complain when their teacher misses one day. On the other hand, children who write only once a week will always complain about the one day. They simply aren't in shape for writing. (Graves, 1985, p. 89)

In addition to having a predictable place in the schedule so that children can look forward to writing, it is also important to provide a writing center with tools available for children to write at their leisure. How we structure it is not as important as the fact that it is structured. A

writing center should make available a variety of tools including pens, pencils, markers, and crayons. Equally important is supplying items such as postcards, rubber stamps, magnetic letters, dictionaries, different types of stationery and paper, and blank books. Children are allowed to visit the writing center throughout the year. They may visit on a daily basis or a weekly basis depending on the teacher. The constraints on the teacher's schedule will determine the frequency with which the children can participate in this activity. At the writing center, the children have the freedom to choose and design their own writing activity. This freedom of choice encourages authenticity in writing.

Interactive interest journals are valuable tools in the writing center. Bromley (1999) describes interest journals as a kind of journal in which students write entries after reading what was written by their classmates about topics such as dinosaurs, football, or dolls. Students select a journal, write about the topic, and illustrate. The next child to choose that journal reads, responds, and expands on the topic. Students can voice opinions, clarify their thinking, ask questions, and build on one another's ideas. Interest journals offer students opportunities to write persuasively. Researchers have found benefits in using interest journals in the classroom. The use of interest journals motivates students to read and write. Many students look forward to the time they spend writing in these journals. Conventions in grammar and spelling often improve as students find it important to have classmates read their entries. Furthermore, interest journals foster written conversations and friendships among students (Bromley and Powell, 1999).

Bookmaking is a popular approach among today's primary teachers. This activity takes many forms. Teachers may have the class make individual books, or let each child create a page to be compiled and bound into a class book. Whichever form is chosen, bookmaking is a valuable tool in that it allows each child to feel ownership as well as feel like a real author. The books

may be shared with peers in the classroom or taken home to share with parents, thus connecting the reading and writing experience.

Author's Chair is an opportunity for children to present their published writing in front of an audience. In preparation, children complete whatever pieces they are working on, and notify the teacher. The entire class gathers on the carpet around a student author. Three or four students take turns sitting in the Author's Chair to share their writing. This is a time to applaud the finished product. It is a publication celebration! It is also an opportunity to learn from peers. Author's Chair works best when done frequently and at regular intervals throughout the year. Some teachers set up a schedule, others like it more open-ended. This is also an excellent time to invite parents and grandparents into the classroom. Whether you invite family and friends, serve juice and cookies, or have an intimate Author's Chair with your own class, does not really matter. What children need more than anything else is someone to listen to them and respond with emotion, questions, and suggestions. It is most important to allow time for students to read their stories to the class (Calkins, 1994). Providing an audience for the writer is what really matters. When students publish, we set them up to succeed. When students are published authors, they make reading and writing connections. Publication occurs when the writing product is presented to its intended audience. Publication matters because it introduces children to the life of writing. It leads them into the world of authorship. Publishing can confirm the reason for writing in the first place (Graves, 1983).

Shared writing is a way of introducing students to writing. The teacher writes while the students tell the story. By watching the teacher model the writing, students observe the connection between oral language and written language. They see their words magically transformed into sentences and stories. They realize that writers can record ideas for different purposes. Shared writing can serve as a method for helping students accomplish a task they are

not yet ready to do on their own. It bridges the way to independent writing (Payne & Schulman, 1998).

The use of Travel Buddies is another way to increase time spent on writing by bringing writing home. Teachers provide a backpack or bag that includes a stuffed animal, a journal, and a note to parents describing the writing activity. Writing activities include shared writing with a parent, independent writing, or a combination of both depending on the child's ability level. The writing consists of the child's reflection of activities with the stuffed animals. The journaling is shared with the class the next day. Some teachers coordinate this activity with an author studied in the class. For example, when studying Norman Bridwell, the author of the Clifford series, the teacher could send a toy Clifford along with the journal and parent letter.

Putting Real Meaning into Students' Writing

Authentic writing, or writing with real meaning, is writing that the student will encounter in everyday life. Some examples of authentic writing are e-mail, letter or note writing, recipe writing, and journal or diary writing. An important side note to this, however, is to make these activities meaningful. A letter written to grandma in class, which gets thrown out and never mailed, is not completely meaningful. The exchange that might ensue between the student and his grandma is what is truly meaningful. Writing can be seen as a useful tool if the assignment addresses the students' real needs. For example, sixth graders usually have complaints or special requests to write about such as the lack of a neighborhood baseball field or permission for a school-wide rock concert (Berliner & Casanova, 1993). The important thing for teachers and parents to remember is that children need to write about their own interests. Encouraging students to become personally involved in their own writing will motivate them.

Baker (as cited in Calkins, 1994) describes what it means to see his works moving an audience:

> "Now boys," he (Mr. Feagle) said, "I want to read you an essay. This is titled 'The Art of Eating Spaghetti.'"
>
> And he started to read. My words! He was reading my words out loud to the entire class.... Then somebody laughed, then the entire class was laughing, and not in contempt and ridicule, but with open-hearted enjoyment. Even Mr. Feagle stopped two or three times to repress a small prim smile.
>
> I did my best to avoid showing pleasure, but what I was feeling was pure ecstasy at this startling demonstration that my words had the power to make people laugh....I had discovered a calling. It was the happiest moment of my entire school career. (p. 266)

Children should not be required to write on topics they know little or nothing about. Children love to write when they feel comfortable with their subject. Children need to have a sense of ownership about their writing, not to write in response to topics given them (Graves, 1983).

Children in a teacher-researcher's classroom who expressed interest in writing often used e-mail for communicating with relatives and friends. Bringing technology into the writing process not only makes editing in writing easier for the young child, but also sparks enthusiasm. E-mail is a new and exciting way to bring real meaning into a child's writing. The immediate response of this form of communication is the perfect gratification for the young child. There is real purpose behind their writing, and they have an audience who will read and respond to their message. The short length of the e-mail format is less threatening and very appropriate for young students. E-mail is another format for parents and teachers to use when encouraging children to write.

Letter writing is a valuable activity to teach communication skills to the students. Letters to family members, businesses, public officials, sports figures or performers are all authentic experiences. The audience provides an immediate response to the young writer and gives direction and meaning to their writing. This is also another way to increase writing time because it is an activity that can be carried out at home or on vacation. The etiquette of letter writing is also an important part of the lesson. Letters can be written to thank a relative for a gift, to express concern for a sick friend, to request information or free materials from a business, or an autograph from a personal hero.

> There is an extra bonus to all this real world writing. When children use their writing for real purposes, they understand why they need to edit their work. They become serious about checking their spelling, punctuation, and grammar and even using their best handwriting. (Harwayne, 2000, p. 22)

Connecting Reading and Writing

When children write, they become better readers. But, in many classrooms reading and writing are taught as separate entities. As teachers move from manual to manual and subject to subject, the connectedness of the material is lost. Reading and writing have a reciprocal relationship and when they are connected instructionally, the children's progress in both is increased. Young children are usually capable of writing the words they can read. Children who write and read may look for meaning in their reading because they see the connection. Readers make better informed writers (Cunningham, 1995). It is important that teachers build on the interrelationship between reading and writing.

It is crucial to read to children. They should be mesmerized by the story, and the final page should be closed with thoughtfulness and satisfaction. Meaningful literature is a valuable

asset to the classroom. Students can live and write inside that literature. It is wonderful knowing a book or author so well it can affect our writing (Calkins, 1994).

Author studies can bring rich literature into the classroom. Literature helps build many reading and writing skills. It also provides a familiar link to writing. "Students begin to borrow the language of the books they have shared, organize their ideas in some of the same ways, and start to explore the different forms of writing" (Payne & Schulman, 1998, p. 56). This is an authentic way to present the narrative, expository, and persuasive forms of writing to the young child.

A teacher who utilizes author studies will fill the classroom with books written by a popular author. Information about the author is shared with the class, as well as photos when available. Teachers may go online to the author's own website to find additional information and activities. Author's may even be invited into the school to share their stories and struggles. An art project may be incorporated as well. Author studies link reading and writing in an authentic way. Students discover that authors are people just like them. It makes becoming an author a very real possibility.

The Reading Recovery program requires children to write every day. Their writing knowledge serves as a resource of information that can help them as a reader. The reciprocity between reading and writing does not occur spontaneously. The child is reminded by the teacher to direct what he knows in reading when he is writing and vice versa (Clay, 1993). It is evident that underdeveloped readers can advance their skills through writing.

Writing is a vital part of practice in reading. "When I teach reading, I try, wherever possible, to use the students' writings. When the context is part of their own lives, students' paragraphs are fertile grounds for building knowledge in reading" (Wiener, 1990, p. 27).

Emphasizing the Creative Aspect of Writing

"Much of the writing we as adults do never gets revised. Don't expect kindergarten and first-grade children to do much revision. The act of writing and transcription is challenge enough" (Routman, 1996, p.88). Separating a concern for content from a concern for mechanics is a delicate subject. If we are too critical of students' writing, they become all too aware that they are inexperienced. They lose self-esteem and confidence and do not know what to do about it. The most important thing we can do for students is to help them write freely. Their writing is not meant to be a display of perfect spelling and handwriting. They are places for deep, thoughtful ideas and careful observations. We want children to concentrate above all on what they are trying to say; necessary corrections can be made later. We do not want them to focus on spelling or grammar as they are writing.

> Composition and transcription can interfere with each other....The problem is basically one of competition for attention. If we are struggling for ideas, or for particular words or constructions, or if our thoughts are coming too fast, then the quality of our handwriting or typing, spelling or punctuation is likely to decline. If we concentrate on the transcription or appearance of what we write, on the other hand, then composition will be affected. (Smith, 1982, p. 21)

Invented spelling is the child's attempt to create words phonetically. The child reproduces the words by pulling out the sounds that they hear. For example, enough may be spelled enuf. A child's early attempts at invented spelling are desirable and should be accepted. Students who are not pressured to spell correctly, or have perfect grammar feel safer about taking risks and writing more creatively. Adversely, overemphasis on these conventions can cause students to feel stifled (Richgels, 1987). Children who use inventive spelling do not have to spend precious time searching out the teacher to help with spelling. Their time is used more

wisely getting their ideas down on paper. When teachers model writing, the children will get the message that they are not expected to write like adults. Through their own inventions, children create systems "amazingly close...to standard English" (Tice, 1992, p. 49). Children eventually drop their invented spellings. "Grammar elements actually need reteaching less than we think. When young children get a lot of practice reading and writing, their spelling gradually moves more and more toward conventional forms, even without direct spelling lessons" (Daniels, Hyde, and Zemelman, 1998, p. 62).

The use of word processing programs on computers is opening up a whole new world for students who previously felt anxiety and apprehension when approaching a writing assignment. Now they are able to write unhindered and produce fluent writing pieces. As a tool for practice in writing, the word processor's usefulness is unparalleled. Writing researchers have long advised that the key to fluent writing is to write as much as possible.

It is important that teachers and parents both work to maintain the creative and joyful expression that is writing. The joy of writing is often lost due to over emphasis on grammar and mechanics. Once lost, it is very hard to resurrect.

Other Forms of Assessment

Assessment is the necessary evil in the writing process. Teachers want children to write freely and with their own voice, and yet progress must be charted and grades must be given. Teachers must see how effective their lessons have been and assess when and how to move the children on to the next level.

Teachers need ways to hold themselves accountable for their students' growth. It is not enough to teach from the heart and hope students are growing. Ways to document and attend to students' progress are necessary. "Assessment is not an optional add-on to our teaching; it is not an afterthought. Assessment is where the action lies. It is the main event" (Calkins, 1994, p.

334). By keeping assessments, teachers may realize that the children they tend to overlook are the very ones who most need their attention.

"We know that "standardized" tests are designed by people outside the classroom as instruments of control over those inside the classroom" (Calkins, 1994, p. 312). It is also known that tests, even if they happen only once a year, often direct how teachers teach. Tests measure academic progress. Teachers are told, in the name of education, to teach a little, then test; even before a skill may be fully mastered. So how can writing be assessed?

Teachers of students in the third grade must give their students a standard achievement test. This is a test that is given to students in third through eighth grades. Students must be prepared and have the knowledge to write a narrative, expository, or persuasive essay on any given topic. It is appropriate that we prepare them for this monumental exam, but inappropriate for the preparation to consume three quarters of the school year.

Power Writing is a tool many teachers use to accomplish this task. This program encourages children to use a topic sentence, sequential order words, details, and a conclusion. Children learn to write in three formats: narrative, expository, and persuasive. This structured writing is not creative but gives children a tool to succeed on the test.

Using a strategy or a predictable formula can help move a child "from a blank page to a decent, workable piece of writing" (Mathena, 2000, p.16). These strategies may help a child who lacks confidence in his or her writing abilities. The child who just does not know where to begin, now has a tool to use: a graphic organizer to fill in, a model to follow, and guided practice to perfect his or her effort.

> It gives them something to attack, something to hold on to. They know where to start, and I think that is pretty much the key. When it {the writing process} is broken down

like that, students see it as a complete task: and they perceive it within their reach. (Walsh, as cited in Mathena, 2000, p. 18)

The flip side of this coin is that this formulated writing restricts the creativity in the piece. The children are so busy concentrating on the formula that they lose their individuality. Others feel that once the child has learned the formula, creativity can and does follow. "You have to do the formulaic writing before you move on to the creative. If they can't do this, they cannot move on to more creative things" (Parish, as cited in Mathena, 2000, p. 19). Debating this issue may not be worth the time and effort spent. The fact is that children should be able to do both. There is a time (and a test) where children will be graded, judged, and doors opened if they are able to complete a formulated piece. There is also a time and place for creativity and free expression. Teachers must provide for both in their classrooms.

Tests do not provide a total picture. They show us one day in the life of a student. They show how the student did on a given day, a given subject, as judged by one individual. We need more information to judge a child's abilities and progress.

The portfolio is a collection of artifacts produced by the student throughout the school year. The assessment is made by the progress shown from the beginning of the year to the end. A portfolio is a collection of work with a purpose (Calkins, 1994). Teachers can learn so much more about a student by reading through this collection of work. Teachers see exactly what the student was able to do on day one, and the growth made by day one hundred seventy-five! This growth is the true measure of the joint accomplishment made during the year.

Students, too, must learn to evaluate their growth. In the primary grades, reading to a buddy often provides a means of discovering for oneself a forgotten word, incorrect punctuation, or an unfinished sentence. This method of assessment offers the student a chance to self-improve. It is less critical than a teacher's red ink. An editing checklist can guide the student

through this self-evaluation process. This method encourages students to think for themselves; it gives them the knowledge and the power to proceed without the teacher. Teaching each child to be independent and self-evaluative should be the goal.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of sending home writing newsletters and articles, during the period of September 2000 to January 2001, the parents of the first and third graders will benefit from the increased awareness of writing as measured by the parent survey.

As a result of the use of technology during the period of September 2000 to January 2001, the first and third graders will increase their interest in writing as measured by the student survey.

As a result of using student journals and bookmaking activities, during the period of September 2000 to January 2001, the first and third graders will understand the direct connection between reading and writing as observed and recorded by teachers on the teacher checklist.

As a result of using a writing center, during the period of September 2000 to January 2001, the first and third graders will increase time spent writing as observed and recorded by teachers on the teacher checklist.

In order to accomplish the objectives, the following processes are necessary:

1. Articles and newsletters that foster writing awareness will be copied and sent home to parents monthly.

2. Technology will be used for e-mail and story writing.

3. Interactive journaling, travel buddies, learning logs, bookmaking activities, notebooks/journals, and portfolios will increase the connection between reading and writing.

4. The writing center will provide a variety of styles of writing to increase interest and time spent writing.

5. Teacher-researchers will utilize a writing skills checklist, a parent survey, a teacher survey, a student survey, and a student rubric.

Project Action Plan

The classroom learning environment is an extremely important element that can inspire or discourage the students in the research project. The teacher-researchers involved will plan for many activities that will stimulate the students. They will offer enriched learning methods and bridge the gap between classroom and home by involving parents and creating activities to connect learning with the outside world. The environment will be created at the onset of the project and will be continuously developed, strengthened, and reinforced throughout the rest of the school year. This will be accomplished by the following methods:

Home-School Connection

The teacher-researchers will encourage parent involvement through monthly newsletters and articles beginning in September and continuing throughout the year. The articles will cover information on how to set up an at-home writing center, pointers on how parents can help their child at home, how parents can make writing easier and more enjoyable, writing activities to do at home, and how to cure writer's block.

Travel buddies are another way to gain parent involvement in the writing process. Beginning in September, a travel buddy will be sent home daily with an individual student. The student will keep the travel buddy overnight, write about the overnight visit, return it to school, and share their adventures with the class. This activity also enhances the reading and writing connection.

Classroom Writing Centers

In September, the teacher-researchers will establish writing centers within their classrooms. The centers will be available throughout the year. A variety of free-choice activities will be offered at the center, to include list making, sign making, story writing, greeting cards,

letter writing, interest journals, and bookmaking. Teachers will supply a variety of paper, writing tools, rubber stamps, and dictionaries. These centers will be available daily.

Technology

The teacher-researchers will incorporate technology in the form of monthly e-mail and bi-weekly word processing. Beginning in September, the students will be able to write letters and stories using the computer. The teacher-researchers' classrooms will exchange e-mail as a modern type of pen pal beginning in October. Both of these projects will be continued throughout the school year.

Literature

Author studies will be presented on a monthly basis throughout the school year. Children will be introduced to a variety of authors through their stories, internet sites, photographs, and autobiographical information. By humanizing the author in this way, the teacher-researchers hope to make student authorship seem more attainable.

Rich literature including poetry will be explored throughout the school year. A variety of styles of writing will be presented to aid the students in their writing endeavors. By hearing quality literature, students will internalize and then hopefully model the style presented.

Fiction and non-fiction books will be made available to the students beginning in September and continuing every month thereafter. A variety of reading levels will be provided. Having these books available in the classroom will help to connect reading with writing. The children will be allowed to self self select books for buddy reading or silent reading. Books will be grouped by topic and/or ability levels. For instance, the books for our author of the month are grouped in one area, seasonal books would be grouped in a different area, and other books would be shelved by ability level only.

Publishing

Author's chair provides an opportunity for the students to share their work with the class. Students may read finished or unfinished work at this time. Suggestions for revising may be offered by peers and the teacher if the student feels the work is unfinished. Praise or applause for the finished product will be appropriate. Published works will be placed on a bookshelf or sent home for parental review. Author's chair will begin in September and be offered on a daily basis for writers who are ready to share. It will continue throughout the year.

Journals

Journaling will be encouraged from September through May. Entries will be dated so that growth can be monitored throughout the year.

Interest journals are interactive and topic oriented. Children choose the interest journal that appeals to them, read other entries, and respond or write their own entry. In the first grade classroom entries may be as simple as a picture with word labels. These journals are available during center, as well as throughout the day for students who complete their work quickly.

Learning logs or reflective journals will also be used as a way to bring writing across the curriculum. Children can reflect on math, social studies, and science activities through their writing. These logs help with metacognition; thinking about one's thinking. These journals are used sporadically as topics present themselves.

To encourage further growth and parent involvement, writing homework will be expected on a daily basis in a take-home writing notebook. These entries will then be shared in class on a weekly basis. Children are allowed to write about things that they learned in school, a family outing or event, or other personal interests. The entries may be as simple as a picture, a single word, or several sentences telling about the picture.

Inventive Spelling

Inventive spelling is the primary student's attempt to spell using their phonemic awareness skills. Students will be allowed and encouraged to use inventive spelling beginning the first week of school and continuing throughout the year. This serves the purpose of allowing the students to get their thoughts down on paper without being held back by a lack of spelling knowledge.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effectiveness of the intervention, the following tools and procedures will be followed:

1. Parent Survey: The parent survey will be administered in the fall and again mid-year. It will establish a baseline of student interest in writing, and show progress made, through the eyes of the parent. The results will be recorded on a master list.
2. Student Writing Survey: This survey will be administered in September to all students and again in January. It will establish a baseline of student interest in writing and show progress made, through the eyes of the student. The results will be recorded on a master list.
3. Student Writing Checklist: The teacher will assess the students' writing skills each month. The checklist will establish a baseline and show progress throughout the year through the eyes of the teacher. The results will be recorded on a master list. The writing samples will be saved by the teacher to demonstrate student progress throughout the year.
4. Student Rubric: The students will fill out the student rubric once during the first quarter and once during the third quarter. This rubric will be used as a conferencing tool between student and teacher. The progress between quarters will be recorded on a master list.

Chapter 4 will present the project results. A description of the interventions, presentation and analysis of the results, conclusions and recommendations for the future will be included.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

This research project was designed to improve the targeted students' writing skills during the period of September, 2000 to January 2001. In order to accomplish this purpose, the teachers of the targeted classes focused on encouraging and increasing parent involvement, spending more time writing in the classroom, incorporating technology, providing rich literature experiences, and encouraging classroom publishing.

Parent Involvement

Parent newsletters were sent home on a monthly basis beginning in September in an effort to increase awareness of writing. These newsletters contained information designed to help parents understand the importance of providing opportunities, tools, and a proper writing environment in the home. The articles also discussed the need for parental modeling of authentic writing experiences with younger children.

Students were provided with journals to be completed at home with parental assistance if necessary. The journal instructions were developmental so that each child could work at his or her own ability level. Some children drew and labeled pictures, others wrote one or more sentences, while more experienced writers completed whole paragraphs. The children wrote about daily happenings or any other topics that interested them. Their writing was then shared either in a small group or with the whole class.

Another type of journaling experience, travel buddies, was shared with families. The

children were given a backpack that included a letter of instruction to the family, a journal, and a stuffed animal or character that would spend a night with the child. The child would write about his or her adventures with the buddy and then share the writing and the illustration with the class the next school day. The writing was done with or without parental assistance depending on the needs of the child.

Increased Time

Increased writing opportunities were offered over the research period through the use of a writing center, journals, word processing on the computer, and bookmaking. Some of the activities were completed individually, while others were presented to the whole group.

A writing center was established in each of the teacher-researchers' classrooms to offer a writing opportunity to the children throughout the day. Children completing assignments early were able to take advantage of the center and its wide variety of materials. The students also made use of the writing center during indoor recess throughout the winter months. The children had available to them pens, markers, stampers, colored pencils, colored papers, blank books, stationery, etc. Interest journals, designed to make the writing experience more interactive, were an additional project at the writing center.

Journal writing was one method used to increase writing time for the children. Different types of journals were available to the students. These include a daily take-home writing journal, individual classroom journals, interest journals, and travel buddy journals. Journal entries ranged from illustrations with or without written dialogue to 20 sentences, depending on the ability of the child. Journals provided the opportunity for students to write on a daily basis as well as connect reading and writing.

Class books were also implemented to encourage additional writing. The format of the class books varied in style. By illustrating and writing individual pages the first and third

graders contributed to form a class book. Sometimes these books were modeled after some of the children's favorite published works and other times they were their own original ideas.

The students were motivated to create stories using the blank books available to them in the writing center. Blank books were easily make by the teacher using writing paper and a construction paper cover. These were individual projects written, illustrated, and published by the students with little or no help from the teacher. The quality of the books varied depending on the writing level of the students. The published works could be put in the classroom library or taken home to be shared with parents. Another variation of this activity is when the children co-authored stories.

Technology

Word processing was provided bi-weekly in some of the teacher-researchers' schools. The children visited a computer lab where they each worked at their own computer creating letters, poems, and stories. Teacher and peer editing was a part of the process. Some of the classrooms also have computers where the children could word process at other times during the day.

E-mailing was presented as a shared writing experience to increase interest in writing. Students in the teacher-researchers' classrooms dictated sentences while the teacher typed. These letters were then e-mailed to another teacher-researcher's class.

Rich Literature

A classroom library, visiting the school library, storytime, and author studies were provided to the students during the research period, September 2000 through January 2001. The classroom library was available throughout the day to students who finished work early, as well as during silent reading time and indoor recess time. The school library was visited on a weekly basis. Children were allowed to check out one or two books (depending on the school policy) to

take home for a week. Stories were read aloud daily in each of the classrooms to help the children become familiar with a variety of authors.

A special collection of books was displayed for specific author studies. The author studied changed monthly, and was sometimes correlated with the travel buddy. Children were allowed to choose from these books during silent reading, or these books may have been read to the children during read-aloud time.

Publishing

Teacher-conferencing with individual students and mini-lessons designed for the whole group guided the students through the development of the story. Content issues such as sequential order and descriptive language could be addressed in these ways.

Peer editing was encouraged in a cooperative setting where students shared their compositions with each other for the purpose of revising the assigned writing exercise. Students were given the teacher-made editing tool (Appendix B) to guide them through the editing process. The children shared their writing and gave constructive criticism to improve their work. Selected stories were chosen to be shared with the whole class.

The students participated in a publishing activity called Author's Chair. The children shared their writing with the whole class upon completion of the writing assignment. Applause and congratulations were awarded as a celebration of the child's accomplishment. The stories were often illustrated and displayed on bulletin boards or in the hallway for others to enjoy.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

A variety of writing journals and other writing assignments were utilized to encourage and evaluate the writing of the students in the teacher-researchers' classrooms. The teacher-researchers engaged in observation to document observable behaviors. Observations on the written work were noted on the student writing checklist by the teacher-researchers to document

and analyze the various stages of writing progress. This checklist was initially employed during the first quarter of the school year, and the teacher-researchers re-evaluated the childrens' work during the third quarter. A sample of the student writing checklist can be found in Appendix A. Writing samples were kept as a visible record of these observations. Data revealed that the interventions implemented during the research period proved to be successful in improving students' writing skills with regards to conventions, content, and enthusiasm. In comparison to the first quarter results (figure 1), where 15% of the first grade students were using appropriate conventions satisfactorily, the third quarter results demonstrate that the number has now increased to 80%. In the area of content, the first quarter results showed 7% of the students produced satisfactory work, which is in sharp contrast to the 79% who are now meeting grade level expectations. Enthusiasm for the writing task has increased from 18% during the first quarter to 72% in the third quarter. The results of the final student writing checklist for first grade is presented in Figure 8.

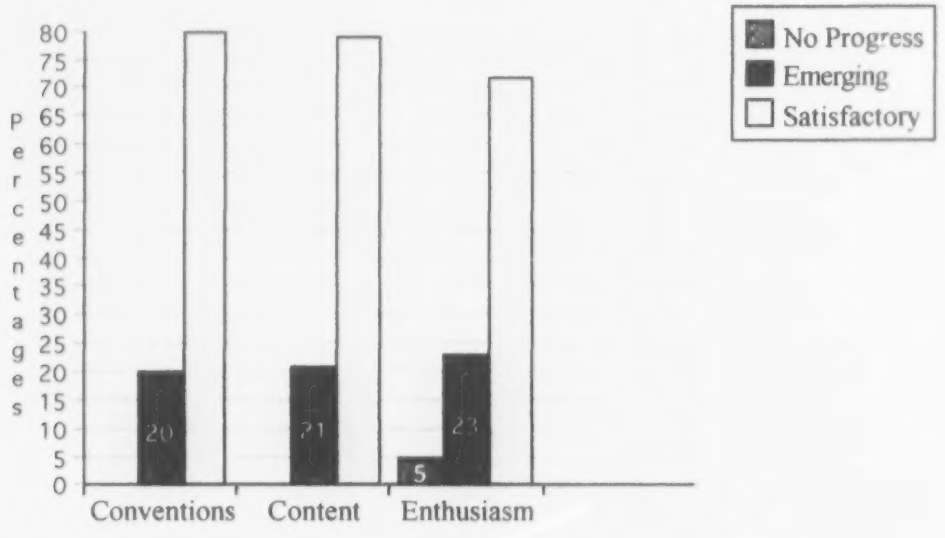


Figure 8. Site A, C, and D first grade writing checklist.

Data revealed that the interventions implemented during the research period proved to be successful in improving the third grade students' writing skills as well, with regards to conventions, content, and enthusiasm. In comparison to the first quarter results (figure 2), where none of the third grade students were using appropriate conventions satisfactorily, the third quarter results demonstrate that the number has now increased to 77%. In the area of content, the first quarter results showed 2% of the students produced satisfactory work, which is in sharp contrast to the 82% who are now meeting grade level expectations. Enthusiasm for the writing task has increased from 0% during the first quarter to 82% in the third quarter. The results of the final student writing checklist for third grade is presented in Figure 9.

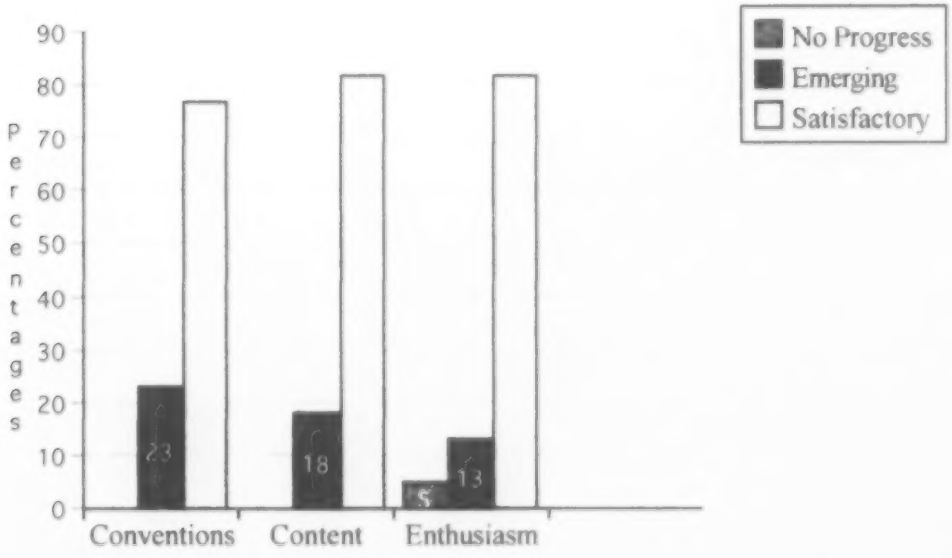


Figure 9. Site B third grade writing checklist

A student writing rubric was completed by the children for the purpose of self-evaluation. The rubric evaluated students' opinions of their use of conventions and content. The writing rubric was completed by the students during the first and third quarters of the research

period. A sample of the student writing rubric can be found in Appendix B.

The results of the final student writing rubric show that more students are feeling confident in their use of conventions and good content in writing. Their attitude toward writing remains high. The results of the final student writing rubric for the first grade is presented in Figure 10.

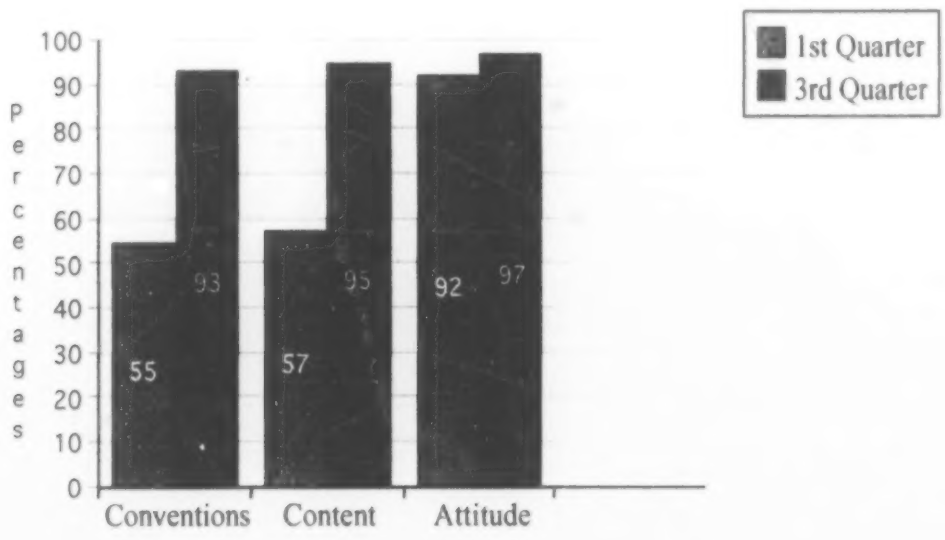


Figure 10. Sites A, C, and D first grade writing rubric-positive response comparisons.

The results of the final student writing rubric for third grade also show that more students are feeling confident in their use of conventions and good content in writing. Their attitude and enthusiasm toward writing became more positive during the research period as is shown by the 24% increase evidenced on the third grade graph. The results of the final student writing rubric for the third grade are presented in Figure 11.

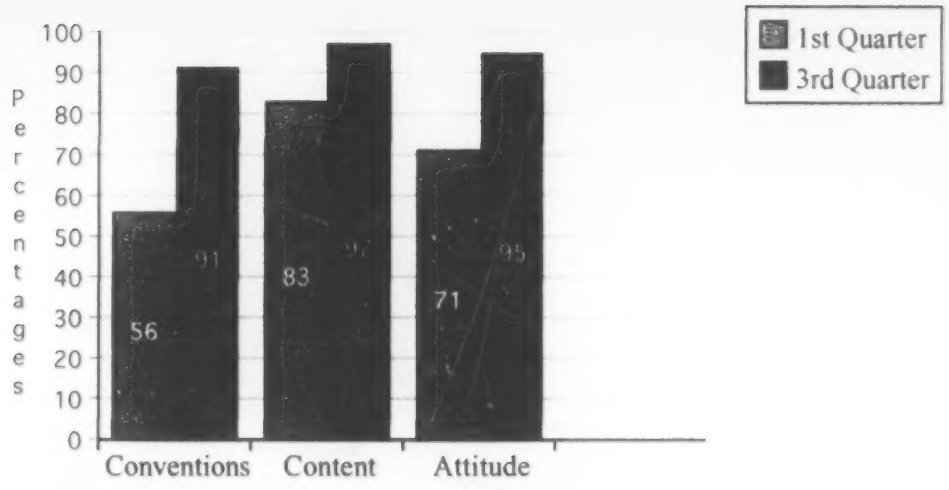
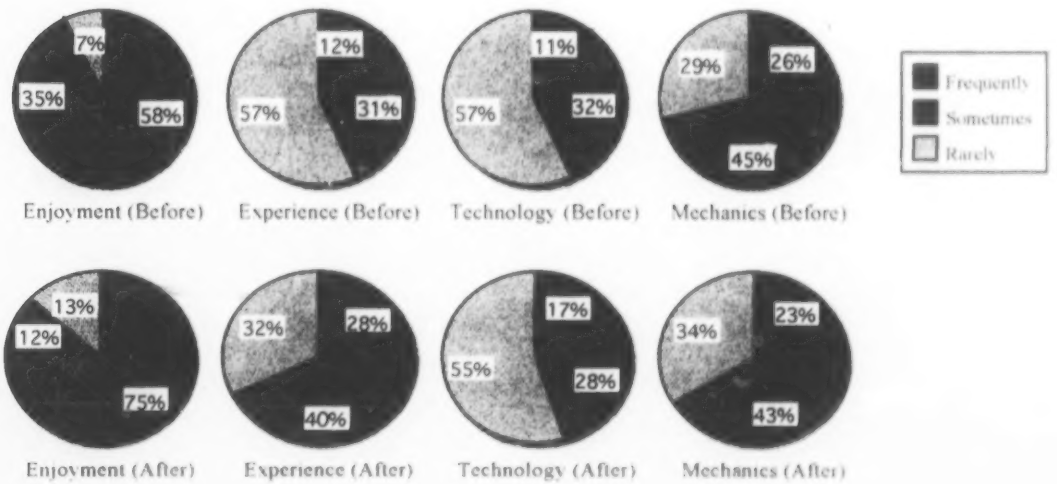


Figure 11. Site B third grade writing rubric-positive response comparisons.

In an effort to connect with the parents and elicit their observations of their childrens' attitudes and experiences with writing, the teacher-researchers administered a survey to the parents in the first and third quarter. The survey asked general questions about the childrens' writing habits and observations made by the parents at home. A sample of the fall and mid-year parent surveys can be found in Appendices D and E. In January, the final survey was sent home asking for parent input regarding writing enjoyment and interest in writing to date. It also gave feedback regarding the importance of the monthly parent newsletters. Out of a total of 83 parents surveyed, eighty-three percent noted a positive response to the monthly newsletter. The teacher-researchers believe the newsletters contributed to the positive results found in the third quarter survey. Data revealed a more positive response to writing and a 25% increase in the amount of time spent writing at home. The number of students frequently writing stories in the home almost doubled during the intervention. In the area of technology, there was not a discernible increase or decrease in the percentage of computer usage. The teacher-researchers did

not expect to see a change in the use of technology due to the prohibitive cost of hardware and on-line services. Two-thirds of the parents responding sometimes or frequently help their child write at home. Much of this may be help with spelling. The teacher-researchers surmise that it is difficult for parents to accept inventive spelling in their child's creative writing. Therefore, even though they have received newsletters on the issue of inventive spelling, they continue to help with the mechanics of the piece. In conclusion, the teacher-researchers noted parents had an increased interest in their children's writing activities at home. Throughout the intervention parents received a variety of writing samples written by their children at school. These samples may have eased concerns or provided new insights into the developmental process of writing. The targeted students' increase in writing ability may also have addressed many of the parent's writing concerns. The comparative data of the parent writing surveys are presented in Figure 12.



Figures 12. First and third quarter parent writing surveys.

The students were surveyed twice during the research period to find out about their attitudes and experiences regarding writing. A sample of this student writing survey can be found in Appendix F. The results show a positive increase in all areas surveyed. The number of students expressing positive feelings towards writing increased by 19% during the research period. The large increase in the number of students reporting more writing experiences (44%) is exciting for the teacher-researchers. The journals and travel buddies proved to be a motivating factor for increasing time spent writing at home. The 20% increase in the area of technology reflects the use of e-mail during school hours. Mini-lessons on the use of e-mail were conducted in some of the teacher-researchers' classrooms during the period of intervention. Results of the final first grade student writing survey can be found in Figure 13.

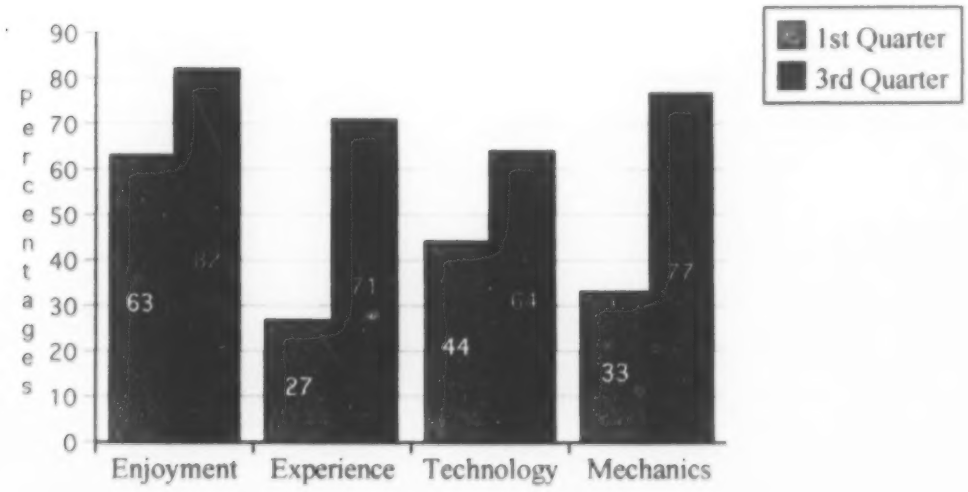


Figure 13. Sites A, C, and D first grade student writing survey-positive response comparison.

The third grade students were also surveyed twice during the research period to find out about their attitudes and experiences regarding writing. A sample of this student writing survey can be found in Appendix F. The results show a dramatic increase in all areas surveyed. The number of students expressing positive feelings towards writing increased by 60% during the research period. There was a 53% increase in the number of students reporting that they are participating in more meaningful writing experiences. The travel buddies proved to be a motivating factor for increasing time spent writing at home. While the journals were motivating for the girls, many boys chose not to participate in this activity. The 42% increase in the area of technology reflects the use of computers for word processing both at home and at school. Whereas many of the students previously used computers for entertainment, they are now including word processing as a computer experience. Improvement in the area of mechanics increased considerably during the research period. The third graders used a revising process at the writing center that was both fun and educational. This playing with editing directly affected the improvement in mechanics. Results of the final third grade student writing survey can be found in Figure 14.

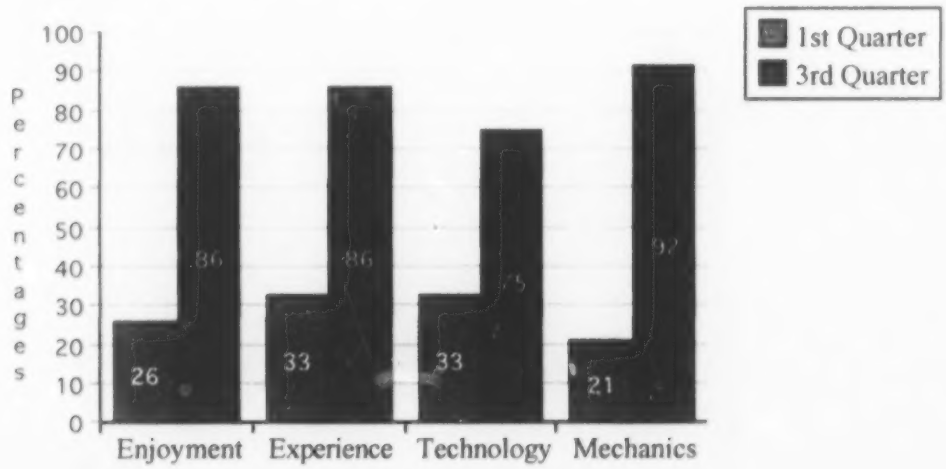


Figure 14. Site B third grade student writing survey-positive response comparison.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data the teacher-researchers noted a marked improvement in the writing skills of the targeted students. Interventions such as the home-school connection newsletters, increased time spent writing, the use of technology, exposure to rich literature, and publishing opportunities appear to have improved students' skills and attitudes towards the writing process The teacher-researchers feel confident that continuing all interventions will continue to expand student abilities and interest in writing both at home and at school. It was concluded that increasing the time spent writing and the variety of writing experiences proved successful. Writing became a natural response to daily happenings at school, whether it was a journal entry or a note home for more glue. Writing was effectively used across the curriculum.

The teacher-researchers agree that this action research project was very beneficial because it provided the impetus to try new techniques that may not have been tried otherwise. Upon reflection, parts of the survey tools were found to be redundant and could have been scaled down or eliminated altogether. Some important questions were left off and some of the questions were interesting but not necessarily pertinent to the research. The teacher-researcher would advise researching samples, a guided focus, ample time, and careful reflection when creating these tools.

A primary recommendation for teachers is to actively seek out opportunities for continued development in the area of writing. It is unfortunate when writing experiences are limited to the proper use of grammar, spelling, and good penmanship. Continued education will motivate creative, authentic writing.

The teacher-researchers were able to attend a primary-level conference prior to the start of the research period. The conference spotlighted the teaching of reading, math, and writing. The teacher-researchers attended several sessions on the improvement of writing skills in the

classroom that succeeded in renewing enthusiasm for writing and introducing countless new ideas to try in the classroom.

The teacher-researchers would also like to encourage administrators to promote and actively offer professional days to their teachers during which teachers could attend conferences, workshops, or staff development classes to increase their knowledge of writing across the curriculum. Districts with the conviction to offer continual, quality staff development to their teachers have the opportunity to drastically improve instruction.

The teacher-researchers concluded that the success of the various interventions may depend in part upon the monetary resources of the school district. A district that is able to spend $5,000 per child is certainly more capable of providing resources than a district that can only spend $2,000 per child. Technology is a case in point. Two of the teacher-researchers' schools had complete computer labs with a computer for each child in the class. Children are provided 2 half-hour writing periods each week. Each child had his or her own disk to save his or her work. Another site had enough computers in the lab for partners to share allowing 15 minutes of writing time per child. The district did not provide disks for the children to save their work, so stories had to be begun, finished, and printed each session. There were no scheduled lab times and priority scheduling was given to the upper grades, therefore the first graders had limited use of the lab. The fourth site did not have a computer lab at all. The teacher-researcher had to rely on the one computer in the classroom for any technology interventions. Each child was able to complete one computer story during the research period.

A similar problem occurred with the daily writing journals that went home with the students. Two teacher-researchers were able to have the journals bound quite easily. A third teacher-researcher paid for the materials to create her own journals. The fourth had to submit a request, which was almost not approved due to the cost to make and bind a journal for every

child in the class. Teachers' choices of activities are limited by the resources at hand.

The monthly newsletter to parents was an easy way to communicate with the parents on important issues in the area of writing. The parent survey responses were very positive, however, parents did not respond to the notes as expected in the comment section. Consequently, teacher-researchers did not gain any additional information about what was going on in the home as a result of the newsletter. The teacher-researchers will adapt the intervention by consolidating the nine issues into four or five newsletters that could be sent home quarterly with the report card or discussed at a parent-teacher conference.

The teacher-researchers felt the use of take-home journals was a valuable intervention. The increased time spent on writing at home helped to improve sentence structure, use of descriptive language, punctuation, and creativity. It provided the student a time for reflection. They also furnished the parents and teachers with an insight into each student's life. It was an opportunity for these caregivers to talk to their student regarding the days activities. Information that the child may not have provided, was now a topic to be shared with the class or family members. They were a wonderful bridge between school and home.

The first grade teachers found total involvement with the journal activity. The students readily became involved in all aspects. They were anxious to illustrate, write, and share their work in class. The third grade, however, seemed to have a gender split in participation. The girls enjoyed using their journal and reflected on a regular basis. The boys did not feel a connection with this activity and had to be motivated to participate through the use of stickers, calls home, and grades. All the teacher-researchers plan to continue this activity for years to come. Take-home journals will be ready to go the first month of school.

The classroom writing centers were positively received from the beginning of the year. The students were anxious to explore the variety of materials present in the center. The

enthusiasm for the center seemed to decrease as the year progressed. This may have been due to time constraints and schedule changes during the year. It is important to introduce new items and activities to the center periodically. For example, interest journals can be introduced seasonally or based on new subject matter. The teacher-researchers will continue this intervention as a part of their writing program next year.

Bookmaking was a valuable part of the research interventions. This activity increased proficiency, social interaction, and confidence. It is a multi-leveled activity that meets the varied needs of individual students. The children enjoyed sharing the books with family and friends. During self-selected reading time, the popularity of the student-generated books was evident. Some of the teacher-researchers routed the books to students' homes which connects the reading-writing activity. For instance, a collection of riddles about favorite characters was compiled into a class book, then routed home for students to read to family members. Researchers believe this activity should remain as a valuable part of their writing program.

The use of rich literature in the classroom was a successful intervention in all of the teacher-researchers' classrooms. The author of the month activity was a huge success. The children gained interest in the various authors as demonstrated through the books they checked out during their library period. The children were able to visit the author website on-line to gain additional information about the author. Information about how real authors deal with their struggles when writing a book helped the students to solve similar problems in their own writing. Often the author book box was empty; the teacher had to request the students to search their desks and return well-loved books to the box so others could enjoy them. The teacher-researchers will continue and recommend this activity to others.

The teacher-researchers feel that publishing work is an important part of the writing intervention. The children enjoyed the opportunity to visit the author's chair to share their

original stories with their friends and teachers. They were able to establish a purpose for writing and share with an intended audience. This intervention will be continued in the teacher-researchers' classrooms.

During the course of the intervention, the researchers discovered countless opportunities for writing across the curriculum. Teachers must be cognizant of the importance of introducing writing at an early age before they will utilize these opportunities. Enthusiasm, time, money, technology, and class size all affect the implementation of the interventions. The teacher-researchers support the continued search for improvement of writing instruction through the use of these interventions and others that may be encountered. The pursuit of this endeavor will challenge students and educators to open the skylight of their intellect and reach for the stars.

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Appendices

Student Writing Checklist
Grades One - Three

Name_____ **Date**_____

Stages of Writing	No Progress	Emerging	Satisfactory
Uses Capital Letters			
Uses Correct Punctuation			
Writes Complete Sentences			
Stays with Main Idea			
Stories have beg/mid/end			
Stories Develop Sequentially			
Uses Expanding Vocabulary			
Uses Inventive Spelling			
Uses Traditional Spelling			
Attends to Writing Task			
Edits Work			
Shares Writing			
Writes 1-5 Sentences			
Writes 6-10 sentences			
Writes 11-20 sentences			
Writes for Many Purposes			

Name _____ Date _____

How Well Do I Write?

	Yes	No
1. I used capital letters to begin names.	☐	☐
2. I used capital letters to begin sentences.	☐	☐
3. Each sentence ends with a punctuation mark.	☐	☐
4. I tried to fix the spelling of the words that are underlined.	☐	☐
5. I used complete sentences.	☐	☐
6. My story has a beginning, middle, and end.	☐	☐
7. I used details that tell a lot about my topic.	☐	☐
8. I read my story to see if it makes sense.	☐	☐
9. I used my best penmanship.	☐	☐

10. Draw a face that shows how you feel about your story.

Teacher Writing Survey

As researchers, we are interested in how elementary school teachers view themselves and their students as writers. Please circle or check the most appropriate response, and be as accurate as possible to keep our survey reliable. Individual responses will be kept confidential. Please return the survey to _____ at _____ School by _____. Thank you!

1. How long has it been since you attended a writing workshop or class?
   0-5 years 6-10 years 11-20 years Never

2. How do you view your own writing skills?
   Poor Fair Good Excellent

3. Do you feel confident teaching writing? Yes Somewhat No

4. How much time do you devote to the teaching of writing in your classroom per week?
   0-1 hour 1-2 hours 3-5 hours 5 or more hours

5. Do you find it difficult to find time for writing due to the demands of your curriculum?
   Yes No

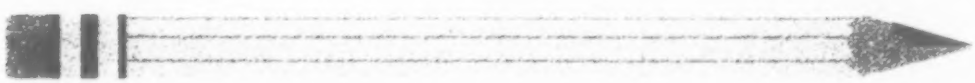
6. Do you use a formal writing program that has been adopted district-wide? Yes No

7. Which of the following writing activities do you use when teaching writing?
   Book reports _____ Letter writing _____ List making _____
   Class books _____ Journaling _____ Shared Writing _____
   E-mail writing _____ Free choice topic _____ Teacher-directed topic _____
   Other _____

8. Overall, how would you describe the attitude of your students toward writing?
   Very negative Negative Positive Enthusiastic

9. Overall, how would you describe the writing skills of your students?
   Poor Fair Good Excellent

10. Do you feel creativity suffers due to the preparation for standardized or state tests?
    Yes No



Fall Parent Writing Survey

Name_____ Date_____

Please check the most appropriate answer.	rarely	sometimes	frequently
1.) Does your child enjoy writing and drawing pictures?			
2.) Does your child write stories at home?			
3.) Does your child write letters to you or other people?			
4.) Does your child write poems at home?			
5.) Does your child keep a diary/journal at home?			
6.) Does your child e-mail friends or family?			
7.) Does your child write at home on a computer?			
8.) Does your child share his writing with you?			
9.) If your child does write at home, does he/she write with your help?			
10.) Do you think spelling interferes with your child's writing?			
11.) Does your child have the opportunity to see you writing at home?			
12.) Do you have concerns about your child becoming a writer?			

Mid-year Parent Writing Survey

Name _____ Date _____

1.) Has there been a change in your child's writing enjoyment since the beginning of this school year?	(circle)	yes	no
2.) Do you feel the newsletters / articles being sent home have increased your awareness of writing practices?	(circle)	yes	no
Please check the most appropriate answer.	rarely	sometimes	frequently
3.) Does your child write stories at home?			
4.) Does your child write letters to you or other people?			
5.) Does your child write poems at home?			
6.) Does your child keep a diary/journal at home?			
7.) Does your child e-mail friends or family?			
8.) Does your child write at home on a computer?			
9.) Does your child share his writing with you?			
10.) If your child does write at home, does he/she write with your help?			
11.) Do you think spelling interferes with your child's writing?			
12.) Does your child have the opportunity to see you writing at home?			
13.) Do you have concerns about your child becoming a writer?			

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STUDENT WRITING SURVEY

1. I enjoy writing most of the time.		
2. I consider myself a writer.		
3. I write for real reasons and real purposes.		
4. I type on the computer at home.		
5. I share my writing with friends and family.		
6. I write in a journal or diary at home.		
7. I write e-mail messages.		
8. I am becoming a better writer.		
9. I like to publish my writing.		
10. I use words easily when I write.		
11. I like to edit and revise my writing.		
12. My teacher gives me enough time to write.		
13. I know the steps to write a good paper.		
14. I like to read my work in the author's chair.		
15. I like to get suggestions from others to make changes in my writing.		
16. I want the teacher to give ideas for me to write on.		
17. I like to choose my own topics to write on.		
18. I am an author.		

Appendix G

Dear Parents and Guardians,

This year, I am participating in a Masters Program in Education at Saint Xavier University. As part of this program, I am required to complete an action research project involving the students. The project will focus on writing and will require the documentation of classroom activities.

Your student's participation is voluntary and will not affect his or her progress reports in any way. Your child's identity will remain anonymous and individual results will be confidential.

Attached to this letter is a survey regarding your observations of your child's writing habits at home. Please complete the survey and the form at the bottom of this letter and return both to me by September 8, 2000.

If you have any concerns or questions, please feel free to call me at school. Thank you for participating in and helping to improve my professional growth through this research.

Sincerely,

_____ Yes, my child will participate in the Action Research Project.

_____ No, I do not want my child to participate in the Action Research Project.

_____ _____

Parent Signature Date

SAINT·XAVIER·UNIVERSITY

Field-Based Master's Program

Saint Xavier University and SkyLight
Field-Based Master's Program

To: School Administrators

From: Program Research Staff

Date: June, 2000

Candidates for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership are required to identify a local educational issue and to design a project to address that issue, with a view to improving educational practice. The candidate listed below has designed an action research project and summarized that design in the attached preliminary abstract. You are encouraged to review this document and share any questions or comments you might have with the degree candidate. Members of the program staff are also available should you have further questions.

Please indicate, on the form provided, that you are aware and approve of the purpose and scope of the proposed project. The form may be returned to the candidate who will forward it to the university. Our best wishes for a successful school year, and we look forward to meeting you at the Research Exhibitions.

Sincerely,

Lynn Bush, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Saint Xavier University
708-298-3761

Esther Mosak
Executive Director, Off-Campus Programs,
School of Education
708-802-6214

Degree Candidate:_____

I have been made aware of the purpose and scope of the candidate's Action Research Project, and I approve of its implementation.

_____

Signature of School Official Date

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